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ENGLISH PREACHER.

V O L. IV.



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T H E

ENGLISH PREACHER:

O R,

S E R M O N S

ON THE PRINCIPAL SUBJECTS OF

RELIGION AND MORALITY,

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S E R M O N I.

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS IN DOING GOOD.

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Who went about doing good.

WHEN the Almighty designed the reformation of the world, and the restoring of man to the image of God; the pattern after which he was first made, he did not think it enough to give us the

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most perfect laws of holiness and virtue ; but likewise set before us a living pattern, and a familiar example, to excite and encourage us, to go before us and shew us the way, and as it were to lead us by the hand in the obedience of those laws. The bare rules of a good life are dead and ineffectual in comparison of a living example, which shews us the possibility and practicableness of our duty ; both that it may be done, and how to do it. Now this was one great end for which the Son of God came into the world, and “ was made flesh, and dwelt among us,” and conversed so long and familiarly with mankind ; that in his own person and life he might give us the example of all that holiness and virtue which his laws require of us. And as he was in nothing more truly the Son of God than in being and doing good, so is he in nothing a fitter pattern for our imitation than in that excellent character given of him in the text, that “ he went about doing good.”

His great work and business in the world was to “ do good.” The most pleasant and delightful, the most happy and glorious work in the world. It is a
work

work of a large extent, and of universal influence; and comprehends in it all those ways whereby we may be beneficial to one another. What our blessed Saviour did in this kind, and what we in imitation of him ought to do, I shall reduce to these two heads. First; Doing good to the souls of men, and endeavouring to promote their spiritual and eternal happiness. Secondly; The procuring of their temporal good, and contributing as much as possible to their happiness in the present life.

First; We should do good to the souls of men by good instruction and by good example.

Under instruction I comprehend all the means of bringing men to the knowledge of their duty, and exciting them to the practice of it; by instructing their ignorance, removing their prejudices, and rectifying their mistakes.

Our Saviour made it his great work in the world, to instruct all sorts of persons in the things which concerned the kingdom of God, and to direct them in the way to eternal happiness; by public teaching, by private conversation, and by

taking occasion from the common occurrences of human life, and every object that presented itself to him, to instill good counsel into men, and to raise their minds to the consideration of divine and heavenly things. And though this was our Saviour's great employment, and is theirs more particularly whose office it is to teach others: yet every man hath private opportunities of instructing others, by admonishing them of their duty, and by directing them to the best means and helps of knowledge.

We should likewise endeavour to remove men's prejudices against the truth, and rectify their mistakes. This our Saviour found very difficult; the generality of those with whom he had to do being strongly prejudiced against him and his doctrine by false principles, which they had taken in by education, and been trained up to by their teachers. And therefore he used a great deal of meekness in instructing those that opposed themselves, and exercised much patience in bearing with the infirmities of men.

It is great charity to consider the inveterate prejudices of men; especially those which are rooted in education, and
which

which men are confirmed in by the reverence they bear to those that have been their teachers. Great allowance is to be given to men in this case; for no man that is in an error thinks he is so; and therefore if we attempt violently to rend their opinions from them, they will but hold them so much the faster; but if we have patience to undermine them by degrees, they will at length fall to the ground.

Another way of doing good to the souls of men is by good example. This our blessed Saviour exhibited in the utmost perfection. For he "fulfilled all "righteousness, had no sin, neither was "guile found in his mouth." And this we should endeavour to be, as far as the frailty of our nature and the imperfection of our present state will admit. For, good example is an unspeakable benefit to mankind, and hath a secret power and influence upon those with whom we converse, to form them into the same disposition and manners. It is a living rule, that teacheth men without trouble, and lets them see their faults without open reproof and upbraiding. Besides this, it adds great weight to a man's counsel and

persuasion, when we see that he advises nothing but what he does, nor exacts any thing from others from which he himself desires to be excused. As on the contrary, nothing is more cold and insignificant than good counsel from a bad man, one that does not obey his own precepts, nor follow the advice which he is so forward to give to others.

These are the several ways of doing good to the souls of men, wherein we, who are disciples of the blessed Jesus, ought in imitation of his example to exercise ourselves according to our several capacities and opportunities. And this is the noblest charity, and the greatest kindness that can be shewn to mankind; it is in the most excellent sense to "give eyes to the blind," to "set the prisoners at liberty," to rescue men out of the worst captivity, and to "save souls from death." It is the most lasting and durable benefit, because it is to do men good for eternity.

The other way of being beneficial to others is, by procuring their temporal good, and contributing to their happiness in this present life. And this, in subordination

dination to our Saviour's great design of bringing men to eternal happiness, was a great part of his business and employment in this world. He went about "healing all manner of sickness and diseases."

Though we cannot be beneficial to men in that miraculous manner that he was, yet we may be so in the use of ordinary means: we may comfort the afflicted, and vindicate the oppressed, and do many acts of charity which our Saviour, by reason of his poverty, could not do without a miracle: we may supply the necessities of those that are in want, "feed the hungry and cloath the naked, and visit the sick," and minister to them such comforts and remedies as they are not able to procure for themselves. We may sometimes with a small liberality sustain a family that is ready to fall, and is struggling under such necessities that it is not able to support itself. And if our minds were as great as sometimes our estates are, we might do great and public works of a general and lasting advantage, and for which many generations to come might call us blessed. Those who are in the lowest condition may do great good

to others by their prayers, if they themselves be as good as they ought. For "the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

The text leads us to observe farther, the diligence and alacrity with which our Saviour executed his great work, "He went about doing good." He made it the great business and constant employment of his life; he travelled from one place to another to seek out opportunities of being useful to mankind. He was not only ready to do good to those that came to him and gave him opportunity for it, and besought him to do it, but went himself from one place to another to seek out objects to exercise his charity upon. He went to those who could not, and to those who would not come to him; for so it is written of him, "he came to seek and to save that which was lost." He was contented to spend whole days in this work, to live in a croud, and to be almost perpetually oppressed with company; and when his disciples were moved at the rudeness of the people in pressing upon him, he rebuked their impatience, and, for the pleasure he took in doing good, made no account

account of the trouble and inconvenience that attended it.

He denied himself the chief comforts and conveniences of human life, that he might do good to others. He neglected the ordinary refreshments of human nature, his meat and drink and sleep, that he might attend this work. Nay, he was willing to deny himself in one of the dearest things in the world, his reputation and good name. He was contented to do good, though he was ill thought of, and ill spoken of for it. He would not refuse to do good on the sabbath-day, though he was accounted profane for so doing. He knew how scandalous it was among the Jews to keep company with publicans and sinners, and yet he would not decline so good a work for all the ill words they gave him for it.

He persevered in his works of mercy notwithstanding the malicious opposition and sinister construction that his good deeds met with. Never did so much goodness meet with so much enmity, endure so many affronts and so much "contradiction of sinners." This great benefactor of mankind was hated and persecuted.

cuted as if he had been a public enemy. While he was instructing them in the meekest manner, they were ready to stone him for telling them the truth; and when the fame of his miracles went abroad, though they were in various ways beneficial to mankind, yet upon this very account they conspired against him and sought to take away his life. Whatever he said or did, though ever so innocent, ever so excellent, had some bad interpretation put upon it, and the great and shining virtues of his life were turned into crimes and matter of accusation. For his casting out devils he was called a magician; for his endeavour to reclaim men from their sins, "a friend of publicans and sinners;" for his free and obliging conversation, "a wine-bibber and a glutton." All the benefits which he did to men, and the blessings which he so liberally shed among the people, were supposed to proceed from ambitious views, and to be done with an intention to move the people to sedition, and to make himself a king: enough to have discouraged the greatest goodness, to have put a damp upon the most generous mind, and to have made it weary of well-

well-doing. For, what is more grievous than to have all the good one does ill interpreted, and the best actions in the world made matter of calumny and reproach?

But, notwithstanding all this, he cheerfully continued in well-doing. It was not only his business, but his delight; "I delight," says he, "to do thy will, O my God." The pleasure which others take in the most natural actions of life, in eating and drinking when they are hungry, he took in doing good; it was "his meat and drink to do the will of his Father." He pursued this work with as much diligence as if he had been afraid he should have wanted time for it. "I must work the work of him that sent me, while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work." And when he was approaching towards the hardest and most unpleasant part of his service, but of all others the most beneficial to us, I mean his sufferings and death, he was not at ease in his mind till it was done; "How am I straitned," says he, "till it be accomplished!" And just before his suffering, with what joy and triumph does

he reflect upon the good he had done in his life ! “ Father, I have glorified thee “ upon earth, and finished the work which “ thou hast given me to do.” What a blessed pattern is here of diligence and alacrity in doing good ! How fair and lovely a pattern for christians to imitate !

The pattern I have set before you may be of excellent use for these two purposes : to shew us our defects ; and, to excite us to our duty.

How does this blessed example upbraid those who live in a direct contradiction to it ; who, instead of “ going about doing good,” are perpetually intent upon doing mischief ; who are wise and active to do evil, but to do good have no inclination, no understanding ! And those likewise who, though they are far from being so bad, yet wholly neglect this blessed work of doing good ! They think it sufficient to do no evil, to hurt and injure no man : not considering that we are commanded not only to abstain from evil, but to do good ; and that our blessed Saviour hath given us an example of both. He not only “ did no sin,” but “ he went about doing good.” Upon this nice point
it

it was that the rich young man in the gospel and his Saviour parted: he had "kept the commandments from his youth, "Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal:" he had been very careful of the negative part of religion; but, when it came to parting with his estate and "giving to the poor," this he thought too hard a condition, and upon this he forsook our Saviour, and forfeited the kingdom of heaven. And it is observable, and ought to be often and seriously thought upon, that our Saviour, describing to us the day of judgment, represents the great Judge of the world acquitting and condemning men according to the good which they had done, or neglected to do, in ways of mercy and charity; for feeding the hungry, and cloathing the naked, and visiting the sick, or for neglecting to do these things: than which, nothing can more plainly and effectually declare to us the necessity of doing good, in order to the obtaining eternal happiness.

There are many indeed who do not altogether neglect this work, yet in a great measure prevent and hinder themselves
from

from doing it as they ought, under a pretence of being employed about other duties and parts of religion. They are so taken up with the exercises of piety and devotion in private and public, that they have scarce any leisure to mind the doing of good and charitable offices to others: or if they have, they hope God will pardon his servants in this thing, and accept of their piety and devotion instead of all. But they ought to consider, that when these two parts of religion come in competition, devotion is to give way to charity, mercy being better than sacrifice: that the great end of all the duties of religion is to make us more ready to every good work: and that it is the greatest mockery in the world, under pretence of using the means of religion to neglect the end of it; and because we are always preparing ourselves to do good, to think that we are for ever excused from doing any.

Others are taken up in contending for the faith, and spend all their zeal about controversies in religion; and therefore they think it but reasonable that they should be excused from those meaner kind

kind of duties, because they serve God, as they imagine, in a higher and more excellent way. But do these men consider upon what kind of duties more especially our blessed Saviour and his apostles lay the great weight and stress of religion? That it is to the meek, and merciful, and peaceable that our Saviour pronounceth blessedness? That "pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction?" That "the wisdom which is from above is full of mercy and good works?" These are the great and weighty things of religion, which, whatever else we do, ought not to be left undone. Do they consider that a right faith is wholly in order to a good life, and is of no value any farther than it hath an influence upon it? So that whatever other duties we may be obliged to, nothing can excuse us from this. How much better is it to do good, than to quarrel about doubtful and uncertain opinions? Were men christians indeed, they would be so much delighted with this better work (more acceptable to God,
and

and more profitable to men) that they would not find leisure, or if they could, they would not find inclination to employ all their time and zeal about things which are at so great a distance from the life and heart of religion, as most of those questions are which christians contend about. Were we possessed with the true spirit of christianity, these would be but dry and tasteless things to us, in comparison of the blessed employment of doing good in a more real and substantial way. If the sincere love of God and our neighbour were but once thoroughly kindled in our hearts, these pure and heavenly flames would in a great measure extinguish the unchristian heats of dispute and contention; as fires here below are ready to languish and go out, when the sun in his full strength shines upon them.

But the hardest part of my task is yet behind, and it is strange it should be so; and that is, to persuade us to the imitation of this blessed example. Let us "go" and do likewise; let the same mind be "in us that was in Christ Jesus;" let us tread in the steps of our blessed Saviour, who "went about doing good." Me-
thinks

thinks the work itself is of such a nature, that men should not need to be courted to it by persuasion, nor urged by importunity. The very proposal of the thing, and the pattern which I have set before you, is temptation and allurements enough to a generous and well-disposed mind. But yet to excite you the more to so good a work, dwell with me a little upon the following considerations.

First; It is an argument of a great and generous mind, to employ ourselves in doing good; because it shews an inclination and desire in us to have others happy as well as ourselves.

It is the nature of goodness to communicate itself, and the farther it spreads the more glorious it is. God reckons it as one of his most glorious titles, as the brightest gem in his diadem, "The Lord mighty to save." Without this quality of goodness all other perfections would change their nature, and lose their excellency. Great power and wisdom would be terrible, and raise nothing but dread and suspicion in us: for power without goodness would be tyranny and oppression, and wisdom would become craft and treachery.

treachery. A being endued with knowledge and power, and yet wanting in goodness, would be nothing else but an irresistible evil, and an omnipotent mischief. We admire knowledge, and are afraid of power, and suspect wisdom: but we can heartily love nothing but goodness, or such perfections as are in conjunction with it. Nothing argues a great and generous mind but only goodness; which is a propension and disposition to make others happy, and a readiness to do them all the good offices we can.

Secondly; To do good is the most pleasant employment in the world. It is natural; and whatever is so is delightful. We act like ourselves whenever we relieve the wants and distresses of others. And therefore this virtue among all others hath peculiarly entitled itself to the name of humanity. We follow nature, obey our reason, and shew ourselves men, in shewing mercy to the miserable. Whenever we consider the evils and afflictions of others, we do with the greatest reason collect our duty from our nature and inclination, and make our own desires
and

and expectations from others a law and rule to ourselves. And it is pleasant thus to follow our nature, and to gratify the importunate dictates of our own reason. So that the benefits we do to others are not more welcome to those that receive them, than they are delightful to us that do them. There is no sensual pleasure in the world comparable to the delight and satisfaction that a good man takes in doing good. That frame of mind which inclines us to do good is the very temper and disposition of happiness. Solomon, after all his experience of worldly pleasures, pitches at last upon this as the greatest felicity of human life, and the only good use that is to be made of a prosperous fortune. "I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice and do good in his life." And a greater and a wiser than Solomon hath said, that "it is more blessed to give, than to receive."

Further; To employ ourselves in doing good is to imitate the highest excellency and perfection: it is to be like God "who is good and doth good," and to be like him in that which he esteems his greatest glory, that is his goodness.
It

It is to be like the Son of God, who when he took our nature upon him, and lived in the world, "went about doing good." It is to be like the blessed angels, whose great employment is to be "ministring spirits for the good of others." To be charitable and beneficent to others, is to be a good angel, a Saviour and a God to men. The example of our blessed Saviour more especially is the great pattern which our religion propounds to us. And we have all the reason in the world to be in love with it; because that very goodness which it propounds to our imitation was so beneficial to ourselves. When we ourselves feel and enjoy the happy effects of that good which he did in the world, this should greatly endear the example to us, and make us ready to imitate that love and kindness to which we are indebted for so many blessings, and upon which all our hopes of happiness depend.

To do good is likewise one of the greatest and most substantial duties of religion; and, next to the love and honour which we pay to God himself, the most acceptable service that we can perform to him. It is one half of the law, next to

to the first and great commandment, and very like unto it: like to it in the excellency of its nature, and in the necessity of its obligation. For "this commandment we have from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also." The first commandment excels in the dignity of the object; but the second hath the advantage in the reality of its effects. For "our righteousness extendeth not to God," we can do him no real benefit: but our charity to men is really beneficial to them. For which reason God is well-pleased, in many cases, that the external honour and worship which by his positive command he requires of us, should give way to that natural duty of love and mercy which we owe to one another. And to shew how great a value he puts upon charity, he hath made it the great test of our love to himself; and for want of it, rejects all other professions of love to him as false and insincere. "If any man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

Let

Let it be, moreover, considered, that this will give us the greatest comfort when we come to die. It will then be no pleasure to men to reflect upon the great estates they have got, and the great places they have been advanced to, because they are leaving these things, and they will stand them in no stead in the other world: "Riches profit not in the day of wrath:" but the consciousness of well-doing will refresh our souls even under the very pangs of death. With what contentment does a good man then look upon the good he hath done in this life? And with what confidence doth he look forwards into the other world, where he hath provided for himself "bags that wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not?" For though our estates will not follow us into the other world, our good works will; though we cannot carry our riches along with us, yet we may send them before us to make way for our reception into everlasting habitations. In short, works of mercy and charity will comfort us at the hour of death, and plead for us at the day of judgment, and procure for us at the hands of a merciful God, a glorious recompence

compence at the resurrection of the just. Which leads me to the last consideration I shall offer to you; which is, the reward of doing good, both in this world and the other.

The advantages of it in this world are many and great. It is the way to derive a lasting blessing upon our estates. Acts of charity are the best deeds of settlement. We gain the prayers and blessings of those to whom we extend our charity, and it is no small thing to have "the blessing of them that are ready to perish to come upon us." For God "hears the prayers of the destitute, and his ear is open to their cry." Charity is a great security to us in times of evil: and that not only from the special promise and providence of God; but likewise from the nature of the thing, which makes way for its own reward in this world. He that is charitable to others provides a supply and retreat for himself in the day of distress: for he engages mankind by his example to like tenderness towards him, and prudently bespeaks the commiseration of others, against the time when it shall be his turn to stand in need of it. Nothing in this world makes a man more and
furer

surer friends than charity. "For a good man," says the apostle, "one would even dare to die." 'Tis excellent counsel of the son of Sirach; "Lay up thy treasure according to the commandment of the most high, and it shall bring thee more profit than gold. Shut up thy alms in thy store-house, and it shall deliver thee from all affliction: it shall fight for thee against thine enemies, better than a mighty shield and strong spear." It hath sometimes happened that the obligation men have laid upon others by their charity, hath in case of danger and extremity done them more kindness than all the rest of their estate could do for them; and their alms have literally delivered them from death.

But what is all this to the endless and unspeakable happiness of the next life, where the returns of doing good will be great, beyond what we can now expect or imagine? For God takes all the good we do to others as a debt upon himself; and he hath treasures sufficient to satisfy the greatest obligations we can lay upon him. So that we have the truth, and goodness, and sufficiency of God for our security, that what we scatter and sow in this kind
on

on earth will grow up to a plentiful harvest in the other world; and that all our pains and expence in doing good for a few days will be recompenced and crowned with the joys and glories of eternity.

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S E R M O N II.

ON NATHAN'S REPROOF OF DAVID.

2 SAMUEL xii. 7.

*And Nathan said unto David, Thou art
the man.*

REPROOF is one of the most ungrateful services a good man can be employed in; as ungrateful generally to the person that gives it, as to those to whom it is given, since it offends as much *his* modesty as *their* pride. For a
C 2 man

man to censure and condemn the conduct of another, seems like paying a compliment to his own character, as it supposes him to be free from those follies which he blames in them.

Our self-love is generally so excessive, that we do not care to see our own faults, and easily take up a prejudice against those who pretend to discover them to us. It is always difficult, and sometimes dangerous to reprove, especially where men have it in their power to gratify their revenge, as they seldom fail to resent such kindness as a great indignity : yet a good man must not have respect to persons, or be affrightened by the prospect of danger to himself from the performance of his duty. So long as men have any sense of the difference between good and evil, and have not sinned away the common principles of virtue, there is reason to hope that admonition, if attended with prudence and tenderness, will not be altogether thrown away. For even natural conscience will become an advocate for those who are faithful in this office. The meek behaviour of David under conviction, is an excellent pattern for us to imitate. We should
learn

learn from hence not to stand up in justification of that which we know is not to be defended; never to harden ourselves against correction, but to receive it with a humble and candid temper, from whatever quarter it may arise. If we consider the method which Nathan took to bring David to a sense of his crime, we shall hardly know which most to admire, his fidelity and courage in delivering the message with which he was entrusted, or his skill and prudence in introducing and conducting the whole of it. He did not refuse the divine command, when he was required to find fault even with his prince: nor did he flatter David when he made known the dictates of heaven; but plainly and frankly told him, "thou art the man:" hereby shewing that he had a superior awe of God, and was not to be deterred from his duty by the fear of what man could do unto him. It is true he proceeded with a very wise precaution in the affair; he did not peremptorily charge his guilt upon him at first (which instead of awakening his conscience might have kindled his resentment) but he introduced the subject by a most apt and beautiful parable:

nable: such as was proper to prepare his mind for the suspicion of it, and yet was not open enough to make a speedy discovery. He begins with telling him of a rich man and a poor man, who dwelt together in the same city, the former of which had exceeding many flocks and herds, the latter but one ewe lamb, of which he was very fond. However, the rich man, for the entertainment of a certain traveller, spared to take of his own numerous cattle, but came and seized on the poor man's only lamb, and dressed it for the stranger. David little imagined that Nathan here by the rich man meant himself, or by the poor man, Uriah, but concluded that the prophet came to demand justice from him against another person; so that he immediately gave the sentence, according to the circumstance of the crime, without any favour or partiality. His indignation was directly excited against the author of such barbarous injustice; his sense of honour and love of equity prompted him to relieve the person who had been treated in so cruel a manner. Nay, so great was his displeasure, that he exceeded the rigour of the law, and doomed the supposed

posed offender to death, over and above the penalty of a fourfold restitution. "As
"the Lord liveth, the man that hath
"done this thing shall surely die, and he
"shall restore the lamb fourfold, because
"he did this thing, and because he had
"no pity."

By this management of the prophet, David stood condemned from his own mouth. Nathan made the application to him, thou art that very person whom thou hast pronounced not worthy to live; thou art the oppressor who hast taken, not an ewe lamb from poor Uriah, but the wife of his bosom. What injury can be more irreparable? What oppression more barbarous than that which thou hast been guilty of?

We shall not enter further into the nature or aggravations of David's sin, but proceed to make some observations, from the words of the text in their connection, which may be serviceable to us. And,

First; The fall of this great and good man affords us a sad example of the frailty of human nature, and the strong power of temptation, which shews us how much we ought to be on our guard

against it. If we consider the general character that is given of David in the Bible, and reflect on the particular virtues which made up this general character, we should find it hard to believe that a man of such eminent piety should fall into such foul and abominable sins, had not the same scriptures which give a testimony to his goodness informed us also of his crimes. Adultery and murder are crimes of the most heinous nature, and are condemned as such by all who have any sense of religion, or sentiments of common justice and equity. But the circumstances which attended David's commission of these sins were if possible more horrid than the faults themselves. He committed adultery with the wife of his friend, and brave general, and basely invaded his bed at a time when he was hazarding his life for him in the field of battle. To compleat the injury, he afterwards gave orders that Uriah should be placed in "the fore front of the hottest battle," and there left, that he "might be smitten and die," which message he sent by Uriah's own hands. One would hardly think it possible for a man who had any principles of virtue to become thus

thus degenerate. To see then such a one not only fall into this depth of wickedness, but also continue under this load of guilt for a considerable time, without discovering any sense of what he had done, until an extraordinary monitor came from God to awaken him; this gives a melancholy proof of our frailty, and shews that good men may fall into scandalous vices, and remain insensible of their condition, without some remarkable interposition of divine grace to renew them again to repentance.

We have need to pray, not only that God would pardon our sins of infirmity, but that he would keep us from running into greater enormities: "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins, let them not have dominion over me."

From this relation which the text refers to we may further observe,

Secondly; The easy and almost unavoidable progress of iniquity, and from what small beginnings the most monstrous wickedness often takes its rise. What a train of evils succeeded the first passion which David entertained for Bathsheba? He indulged his lascivious desires, and from

hence proceeded the prodigious crimes of adultery and murder. And this is but the natural course of iniquity. One sin leads on to another, and that to a third, and so on till a man has run the whole round of transgression, till he is gone so far as to make his retreat very difficult, if not almost impossible. The beginnings of sin in general as well as of strife, which is one particular species of it, are as when one letteth out water; the stream is but small at first, but by degrees the passage widens, till it breaks in upon us like a flood, and we are borne down by the mighty torrent without any opposition. When men turn aside at first into an evil course, they do not think of proceeding any lengths in it, but are ready to promise themselves that they will venture only so far as they hope they may without any great or certain danger. But alas! the way of sin is a declivity, and though the descent be easy, every step forward makes the return so much the more difficult; and a man may almost as well say to the proud waves of the sea, "hitherto shalt thou come and no farther," as pretend to command the impetuous appetite to which he
has

has once submitted. The commission of a little sin prepares for a greater, and that for a greater still, and thus the heart is gradually hardened by its deceitfulness, and he learns to commit those iniquities without remorse, the very thought of which would at first have been shocking. Had Nathan foretold to David the degree of wickedness to which his licentious desires would lead him, it is probable he would have replied to this prophet as Hazael did to another when he declared what havock he should hereafter make among the lives and liberties of Israel, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" But when a person once suffers himself to do that which is forbidden, he cannot say where he shall stop. For guilt is an utter enemy to serious consideration, without which there can be no hope of conversion. Having yielded to his lusts he shuns all reflection on his conduct, in order to prevent that confusion and horror which these thoughts would unavoidably create in his mind. As severe as men are upon the sins of others, they do not or will not perceive the deformity of their own; their judgments are blinded

by their passions, and self-love teaches them to think favourably of their actions. Their hearts will never want some veil to cover a beloved iniquity ; there is always some plea at hand to extenuate or excuse their behaviour, with which they rest satisfied without suffering themselves to enter closely into the nature and circumstances of their crime, which would almost overwhelm them in distress and terror : insomuch that unless some extraordinary light darts in upon their consciences, and forces them to behold what manner of persons they are, they will probably go on adding iniquity to iniquity, until they have contracted such inveterate habits of vice, as will render their recovery extremely difficult, if not impossible.

The description Solomon gives of such a one must move any heart with pity, but that of the enslaved profligate himself, who “ goeth on as an ox to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks, till a dart strike through his liver, as a bird hasteneth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.” As insensible as a brute he runneth to his ruin, and too late admits

mits the serious reflection, "How have
" I hated instruction, and my heart de-
" spised reproof, and have not obeyed
" the voice of my teachers, nor inclined
" mine ear to them that instructed me."

The use we should make of this observation, is to check the first risings of lust, and not incline to the ways of sin: we should particularly guard against wilful or presumptuous sins, because these lay waste the conscience; they harden the heart, and render it impenetrable to conviction, by making men either secure on the one hand or desperate on the other. If we allow ourselves to enter the path of sin, especially if we take any wide steps in it, it is probable we shall proceed till we stumble upon the grave, and fall into hell.

Thirdly; This history affords us a remarkable instance how much self-love is apt to blind the eyes of men, and prevent their passing a true judgment on themselves and their actions. How forward was David to condemn, and to punish a supposed unmerciful oppressor; and yet how quietly could he tolerate in himself far greater, and more aggravated crimes!

crimes ! He was for sentencing the rich man to death, who had cruelly robbed his neighbour of his lamb, but he had no thought of condemning himself for taking away the wife of Uriah, and then ordering him to be killed. "As I live," says he, "the man that hath done this thing shall surely die." If he was worthy of death for his barbarity and injustice, what punishment could David think equal to his own crime, who had debauched the wife of Uriah, and afterwards contrived his murder ? But he had no such criminal in his eye when he pronounced the decree against the rich man, till Nathan struck him with surprize and horror by that sudden and unexpected application, "Thou art the man." How strangely are men prejudiced in their own favour, that they cannot see the deformity of the most monstrous vices in themselves, while they look with indignation upon far less crimes committed by others ! and how forward are we to censure in others, those sins which we ourselves may not have inclination, or opportunity to commit ? The covetous
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man will rail at the prodigal, and the prodigal reprimand the miser; the drunkard will reprove the glutton, and the glutton in his turn censure the drunkard; and thus men under the power of any different passions will condemn those of others while they be insensible of their own. This should teach us to make use of the strictest caution in our enquiry into ourselves, that we are not imposed upon by those false colourings which our corrupt inclinations easily put upon our actions, so as to think favourably of those evil ways, which after all will expose us to the displeasure of the Almighty. Which leads me to a

Fourth observation, with which this remarkable story supplies us for our instruction, which is, that the way to form a true judgment in any case, is to put ourselves as much as possible out of the question, and suppose that we are passing judgment on another person.

Our evil actions are like some foolish dresses, which we are ready to think become us well enough till we see them
upon

upon some other person. How odious did injustice and oppression appear to David in another, when he did not attend to them in himself! We are too much parties in our own case, to be equal or fair judges; but with regard to others, we can consider their actions with indifference, and weigh them with impartiality, for here we are in no danger of being bribed by our passions to judge more favourably than the case requires. Whereas every one is willing to shew all the favour he can to himself: our understanding is influenced by our appetites, and hardly at liberty to censure freely any thing which they prompt us to do. We are unwilling to condemn what we love, and prone to overlook the evil which others may see in our behaviour. When we endeavour to weigh our own conduct, it will be very difficult to preserve an even balance; self-love will throw false weights into the scale, and if possible, impose upon us. In order to form a true judgment, the proper way will be to endeavour to divest ourselves of all concern in it. Let us act as Nathan did by David, remove the case to another

another person, and imagine ourselves out of the question. Every man appears well in his own glass, but let us transfer our actions to another, and then say how does this conduct look in him, in whose behalf we are not at all prejudiced! David was led to a sight of his own wickedness, by the representation of the same ill conduct in a stranger. Let us improve the hint by observing some such method in our enquiry into ourselves: by this means we may be best enabled to behold our faults, and to repent of them as David did, and “abhor ourselves in dust and ashes.”

To conclude; Let us receive the word of exhortation, and make a good use of the warning given us by this great man's fall. Let us search, and try our ways, and when we are thus employed, let us apply with humility and sincerity to the great searcher of hearts in that prayer of the Psalmist, “Search me, O God, and “know my heart: try me, and know “my thoughts. And see if there be any “wicked way in me, and lead me in the “way everlasting.” And when by his assistance we have discovered any errors,
let

let us immediately apply ourselves to reform them. We have encouragement from the example before us to hope that if we confess and forsake our sins we shall find mercy. May we have grace to consider "our ways, and turn our feet unto God's testimonies." Amen.

SER.

S E R M O N III.

THE MISCHIEFS OF SLAVISH COMPLAISANCE, AND COWARDICE.

PROVERBS XXIX. 25.

The fear of man bringeth a snare.

IT is wisely ordered by the Author of our being, that every passion of the soul may not only be of great use to us, if its natural design and tendency be regularly pursued, but is capable also, by being perverted, of causing much vexation and misery to ourselves, and injury to our fellow-creatures : for this is a demonstration

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monstration founded in nature, and obvious to the meanest capacity, of the necessity of self-government, and that we should take the utmost care to keep all our affections and appetites within those bounds which the Creator hath prescribed. Thus, for instance, the desire of happiness, and aversion to pain and misery, which work so strongly in all mankind, is evidently, in itself, of the highest advantage; but if we form wrong notions of the happiness which we ought ultimately to pursue, and the evils we should chiefly avoid, it will as certainly prove fatal to us. Again, the passion of shame is an excellent preservative from base and dishonourable actions, and nothing is a stronger guard and security to our virtue and innocence than this, when regularly exercised, and employed about proper objects; but a false shame, which is influenced more by the opinions and customs of men, than by the eternal differences of things, a false shame that breaks our spirits, and makes such tame cowards of us, that we have not resolution enough to stand up for the honour of God, and the immutable obligations of virtue; nor, consequently, to assert
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and maintain the dignity of our reasonable nature; this, I say, necessarily destroys every thing that is praise-worthy and generous in us, and must betray us into innumerable errors in practice, which are not merely inconsistent with integrity, but will render us, to the last degree, vile and contemptible.

And the same may be said of fear: while it proceeds upon right principles, and is proportioned to the weight and moment of the evils about which it is conversant, it must be calculated to serve the most beneficial purposes, as it warns us where our greatest danger lies, and strongly prompts us to avoid it. But the case is quite otherwise when it forms imaginary dangers, and alarms us with false terrors; when fancy or corrupt passion, and not the reason of things is the foundation of it; when we fear natural evils, which, under the direction of an all-wise Providence, may be overruled for good, more than moral, which tend necessarily and invariably to the misery and ruin of the rational creation; and the censures and frowns of men, whose wisdom, power, and duration are confined and limited, more than the displeasure

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pleasure and vengeance of the almighty and eternal God : for then our fears will infallibly turn us aside from our duty, and be attended with most pernicious consequences; as for the sake of avoiding lesser and comparatively trifling evils, we shall run ourselves upon others that are infinitely more dreadful. This shows the vast importance of looking well to our principles of action, and indeed of making this our first and chief care; because if the prevailing principles of our minds are corrupt and vicious, it is, in the nature of things, impossible that our practice should be virtuous and regular. Evil principles of action, as long as they are entertained and indulged, as necessarily produce a wicked life, as any other causes do their natural and immediate effects; and therefore till they are corrected and altered, it is in vain to expect any reformation in the outward conduct. This is the ground of Solomon's observation in the text, which I now proceed to consider more particularly, in the following method.

First, I shall show what we must understand by "the fear of man"; secondly, enquire in what sense it "bringeth a snare";

snare"; and, thirdly, offer some remedies against it.

In the first place, I am to explain what we must understand by "the fear of man." "The fear of man" I take in its largest sense, not only as implying the fear of those positive evils and punishments which the power and vengeance of man can inflict, but a reverence of human authority and customs, and a dread of the censures and reproaches of our fellow-creatures. But that I may speak distinctly, and without confusion upon this subject, it may be proper briefly to show that this phrase, when it is used, as in the text, in a criminal sense, must be understood with some caution, and limitation. For,

There is, undoubtedly, a reverence due to human authority in all points that do not exceed the just bounds of it; and the paying this regard is absolutely necessary to hold the frame of civil societies together, and prevent lawless riot and confusion. In like manner there is a deference due to the innocent customs and usages of the world; and singularity in such instances, in opposition to the unanimous opinion of our fellow-creatures,
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can be the effect of nothing but weakness, or obstinacy. Such a conduct is as ridiculous, as the complying in things morally evil would be wicked. It is also utterly inconsistent with a social spirit, or with that temper of mind which is absolutely necessary to answer the great end for which men agreed, at first, to enter into society. For the ends of society cannot be secured but by mutual condescension and respect, and the compliance and submission of the minor part in things lawful, and which are entirely of a civil nature, to the judgment and practice of the majority; and it is impossible but peace and good order must be destroyed, if all the members of it are obstinate and untractable.

Again, as it is natural for every one who loves himself to desire the favour and good opinion of his fellow-creatures, and his duty to cultivate and improve it by all just and honourable methods, because the quiet and convenience of his life, and his usefulness too, depend in a great measure on his reputation and character in the world; he cannot help being afraid of censure and reproach, and ought to be solicitous to avoid, if possible,

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its being fixed upon him, or to deliver and clear himself from it. Provided he stoops to nothing that is contrary to the principles of true honour and virtue, such a concern is highly just and reasonable, and what no wise man can be without. And, on the contrary, men must be of a temper quite stupid, and destitute of common reflection, if they have no fear at all of public reproach and infamy; and must lose, besides, what is in the nature of things (and therefore what must appear to be designed as such by the great Author of nature) a very powerful restraint from mean, ungenerous, and disgraceful practices.

Moreover, the principle of self-preservation necessarily excites in us a fear of those evils which we have reason to apprehend from the power or malice of any of our fellow-creatures, and directs to the use of all proper means for our own defence and security. We are so far from being obliged to have no care or solicitude on this head, that we shall be guilty of the utmost rashness and folly, if we expose ourselves to their resentment unnecessarily, and run upon any sufferings, which with honour and a good

conscience may be avoided. All innocent, not excepting the most artful compliances and evasions must be used, to screen ourselves from evils of this kind; otherwise, instead of being martyrs in a good cause, we only suffer the natural effects of our own wilfulness and obstinacy. And finally, a dread of those punishments which the civil magistrate inflicts, for the preservation of men's natural rights, and the security of their persons and properties from unjust violence, and to deter from the commission of such vices as are inconsistent with the public peace and welfare; this, I say, is not only lawful, because natural inconveniences and evils of all kinds cannot but be the object of our fear and aversion, but necessary; both as the ends of these punishments cannot be answered, nor, consequently, civil societies subsist, unless we are struck with terror at the apprehension of them, and because they are in themselves fit and reasonable, and no more than what the crimes, for which they are executed, strictly deserve. A man indeed that suffers, by unjust human laws, for what is really praise-worthy, may support himself with this reflection, that

that he suffers for the cause of truth and virtue, and, being conscious of his integrity, defy the power and cruelty of his persecutors; but he that can bear to think, without horror, of being deservedly branded with public infamy, and cut off as an enemy to society and the good of mankind, must have extinguished his reason, and lost all remains of honour and ingenuity.

Thus far then the fear of man may be defended and justified. In some of the instances which have been mentioned, it is, at least, lawful, because founded on principles that human nature cannot throw off; and in others virtuous, and commendable. But it becomes criminal, when it is the ruling and predominant principle in our minds; because then it either supposes that we look upon the approbation and favour of men as our supreme good, and upon the frowns, reproaches, and terrors of the world as the greatest evil that can befall us; or, at least (as it is always the nature of that which is the prevailing principle to overrule and controul all other principles) it will be too hard for the fear of God, bear down our natural sense of good and

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evil,

evil, and destroy that presence of mind, that constancy and resolution which is necessary to enable us to behave with honour to our nature, and suitably to those relations in which the all-wise Creator hath placed us, and to overcome the difficulties of a virtuous course.

From this short account of the sinful "fear of man" which the text speaks of, it will easily appear, in the second place, in what sense it "bringeth a snare," which I proceed therefore to consider. Not to insist on many little mean compliances, and smaller inconveniences, to which it exposes men; it throws temptations in their way which are likely to prevail so far, as to destroy all improvements in true wisdom and virtue. For,

Let us suppose a man under this slavish principle engaged in searches after truth; what proficiency is it possible for him to make? If he has an extravagant veneration for human authority, nothing must be received but what has that stamp upon it. If he aims at being popular, and dreads ill will and censure, no truths can be admitted but such as are fashionable; and have the current character

character and reputation of orthodoxy. The odious names of infidel and heretic will frighten him from proceeding in his enquiries, and calling in question the common standard. Or, if he is awed by the vengeance of civil power, and the terrors of this world, this must raise an unconquerable aversion in his mind against all truths that may expose him to danger and suffering.

In order to the making improvements in divine knowledge, it is absolutely necessary that the mind be free, calm, and unruffled, under no restraint, or terror; otherwise it will be reserved and partial: there must be no corrupt passion to darken the understanding, nor private interest to mislead and pervert it. But the man we are speaking of is held in strong fetters; his fears distract and confound him; he sees difficulties and discouragements on every side, and but one safe path to walk in, even the old beaten track chalked out by authority, which is the only way to obtain that applause, and favour, which he so ardently pursues, and to avoid that disgrace, and those sufferings, which are of all things most terrible to his imagination. And

being thus enslaved, is it to be expected that he should exercise impartiality and freedom of thought? Where the light is so offensive, is it not highly probable that the eyes of the mind will be shut against it? It is difficult even for men who are influenced by more rational and noble principles, and have a virtuous turn of mind, to maintain an unbiassed and steady pursuit of truth, when the world frowns upon it, and loads it with reproaches and persecutions; but to him who is ready to sacrifice every thing to his reputation and worldly interest, it must be absolutely impossible.

And the slavish "fear of man" will have the same malignant influence upon our morals, as it has been shewn to have in its direct tendency upon our faith: for when it is risen to such a height as to over-rule the dictates of natural conscience, and entirely to destroy the strength of our minds, we are an easy prey to every temptation, and lie open to the most desperate and abandoned wickedness. Its tendency to an immoral practice appears, in part, from what has been already said, wherein it has been shewn, that in difficult and discouraging times it leads men
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to conceal or deny the truth, and consequently, to dissimulation and hypocrisy; but this, being a matter of great importance, deserves to be more particularly and fully illustrated.

Let us suppose then, a person of this character to live in very corrupt times, when virtue is unpopular, and labours under disgrace, and vice is prevailing and fashionable: he dreads the reproaches of the multitude; and yet these he is sure to meet with if he pursues a virtuous course of life: what then can be expected but that he will give himself up to all the extravagancies of the age, and fall in with the common degeneracy? The charge of singularity, and the odium that attends it, will be more than sufficient to counterbalance his weak inclinations towards virtue, and to make him as heartily and universally vicious as the rest of his neighbours. Though it be really our glory to be singular in asserting the honour of our Maker, and vindicating the law of our reasonable nature, which is of the most sacred and indispensable obligation, and a cause of the highest importance; and the utmost pitch of madness to debase our excellent faculties, and

make ourselves miserable, only because others are so frantic as to do the like, and to avoid the imputation of obstinate and unmannerly preciseness.

Again, if it be a man's favourite scheme to acquit himself to the polite world, and he dreads their contempt as the greatest of all misfortunes; what is the natural consequence? Why, that if these pretenders to politeness are dissolved in effeminacy, and make luxury and riot the characteristic of a fine gentleman, he must immediately resign himself up to the gratification of his appetites, and to all the modish vices. And, accordingly, though it be indeed shocking and monstrous, and greatly to the disgrace of the present age, there are too many, who, from a false modesty, and because they will not be so rude as to contradict the general humour of their company, are guilty of extravagancies which they have a secret abhorrence of; and some, it is to be feared, who to raise their character for debauchery, and consequently for an elegant taste, boast of vices that they never committed. Alas! where is the reason of mankind, where their becoming sense of the dignity of human nature, when they can glory in what is the reproach

proach and shame of it; and endeavour to support the reputation, not merely of being men, but the most refined part of the species, on such actions as sink them below the rank of brute creatures! For, in truth, as such persons will not think for themselves, they ought to be told, that vice and wickedness of all kinds is the greatest abuse and violence that can be offered to their rational faculties; that there cannot be a fine gentleman without good sense, and a just discernment of things, at least, not without true honour, which is inseparable from virtue; that blaspheming the established religion of their country, and those things which all considerate and sober men highly value and reverence, is a very mean accomplishment, and what not only a serious deist, but even a downright atheist, who has any knowledge of the world, and any notion of right behaviour, may be ashamed of; and that a singular awkward dress, an impertinent trifling gaiety, and a thoughtless unmeaning conduct, will not atone for a violation of those essential rules of civility and decency. Let me add, that all the vices into which the evil principle mentioned in the text be-

trays those who are governed by it, argue the utmost baseness of spirit, and consequently both they, and the principle from whence they proceed, are as inconsistent with the character of a hero, and a man of true honour, as they are with that of a good christian.

To conclude this head, if it be our ultimate view to secure the countenance and favour of persons in authority, and avoid their displeasure, this likewise will subject us to many snares and inconveniences. The laws indeed of all well regulated societies are favourable to virtue, and pointed at vice and immorality: but notwithstanding this, the state of things may be, and oftentimes is so corrupt, that vicious compliances are necessary to obtain the good will of our superiors; and when this is the case, the man who is determined, at all adventures, to secure their approbation, and avoid their frowns, must be easily captivated and seduced: he must, and probably will be a companion with them in luxury and prodigality; lie and dissemble, flatter their vanity, and be the instrument of their ambition, covetousness, and unlawful pleasures. So that, in every

very view of it, the slavish "fear of man" has an evident tendency to corrupt our integrity, and leads to the most hurtful and destructive vices.

But it may be said, there is still this advantage, that when authority, power, and interest are on the side of true religion and virtue, this principle will as effectually excite to a love and reverence of these, as it will, in contrary circumstances, to immorality and wickedness. It must be owned it will to outward appearance. But this desirable state of things is likely to happen but seldom, the generality of the world being too frequently in the wrong, with respect both to their opinions and practices; or if it should happen, men would entirely lose the merit of their affected concern and zeal for virtue and piety, because of the motives from which it flows. For nothing can render either our enquiries after truth, or the performance of religious duties properly laudable, but their being the matter of our free choice, and our acting from such dispositions as have a tendency to the same conduct in all circumstances. And that virtue, on the contrary, can be worth but little, which

in times of prosperity, and when it is countenanced and upheld by the influence of authority, and by public favour, only seems to flourish, and does not spring from its genuine principles; but fades and languishes, and entirely disappears as soon as it is brought to a trial. Having thus considered the snares and temptations, fatal to religion and sincerity, which attend “the fear of man,” when it is a predominant and governing passion, I proceed,

In the third and last place, to offer some remedies against it. And,

First, Let us maintain and improve in our minds a strong sense of the necessary difference between good and evil. For if we are firmly convinced that there is a fixed and eternal law for the conduct of all rational beings in the nature of things, which cannot be altered by custom and opinion, nor by any authority whatsoever, no not by that of God himself, we shall not be easily persuaded to violate the rules of our duty, upon any considerations. Men who think loosely may be apt to imagine that the obligations of virtue are not so strict and indispensable; and perhaps

haps, that God will excuse a deviation from them, when they are forced to it by reproaches and persecutions : but had they enquired into the true grounds of morality, they would have found that its obligation is immutable, and consequently, that where there is a wilful departure from it, nothing can possibly recommend us to the divine favour. And thus a more steady regard to religion would prevail, and “the fear of man” proportionably decrease. To this remedy against it, let us add,

Secondly, A becoming sense of the dignity of our nature. This can only be supported by an inflexible adherence to the rules of virtue and true goodness ; but, by improving in these, we are capable of advancing to a godlike perfection. And shall we dishonour and obscure our rational powers, by enslaving them to vice and wickedness ? This thought, made habitual to our minds, would sustain our resolution against all the terrors of the world ; this thought, I say, that we have the honour to be formed after the image of God, and that as long as we maintain our moral rectitude, we continue to resemble him ;
and,

and especially, that by being stedfast in our duty, in spite of all opposition and discouragement, we imitate the greatest and most exalted part of his character, his constant and invariable goodness.

Thirdly; Against the vice pointed at in the text, the wise man advises as a remedy, in the latter part of the verse, "trust in God: the fear of man bringeth a snare, but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord, shall be safe." For if we firmly believe the wisdom and goodness of his over-ruling Providence, that he orders all things for the best, and with a design to promote the general happiness; and that all the evils we suffer for righteousness sake will be abundantly compensated, and turn in the end to our unspeakable advantage; this ought in reason, to moderate our fears, compose the disorder of our minds, and reconcile us to all events. And accordingly, we find this serene and pious disposition in the holy Psalmist, who expresses himself thus, with an air of security and triumph: "The Lord is my light, and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord
" is

"is the strength of my life, of whom
"shall I be afraid?" And again; "The
"Lord is on my side, I will not fear
"what man can do unto me."

Finally; As the most effectual remedy
against "the fear of man," let us culti-
vate a supreme reverence of God. These
two are absolutely inconsistent, and can-
not subsist together: for as "the fear
of man" destroys our due regard to the
Divine Majesty, the true fear of God
will limit, and reduce within reasonable
bounds, the dread of our fellow-crea-
tures. Let us therefore, by frequent
meditation, fix in our minds a lively
idea of his absolute perfection. Let us
contemplate his spotless holiness, strict
impartial justice, infinite power, and
boundless wisdom, in order to excite the
highest possible awe and veneration of
him. Let us seriously consider that he
is the Author of our being, and of every
thing we enjoy, that we are necessarily
dependent upon him, that our happi-
ness and misery are entirely in his pow-
er, who has universal nature at his
command, and is the sovereign uncon-
troulable disposer of all events; and,
confe-

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consequently, that his favour is our life, and his displeasure the most dreadful of all evils. If we are afraid of the reproaches of ignorant, prejudiced and sinful men, how much more strongly should we be concerned to prevent his having an ill opinion of us, who is the greatest and best of beings, and whose judgment is always according to truth, certain and infallible? To conclude, the wisdom of God is capable of contriving, and his power of executing vengeance infinitely more terrible on impenitent sinners, than any they can undergo in the present state; and whereas the scene of all the tyranny and oppression which we can suffer from our fellow-creatures is confined with the narrow compass of this mortal and uncertain existence, he has an unchangeable and endless life, and consequently, can not only punish in what degree, but to what length of duration he pleases. Our Saviour's advice, therefore, is certainly very just and reasonable; "not to fear them who kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather, to fear him," who after having made
perverse

perverse and irreclaimable offenders miserable, in such a measure, and for so long a period, as the wise ends of his government require, can absolutely "destroy both soul and body in hell."

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S E R M O N IV.

THE REASONABLENESS AND ADVANTAGE OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

HEBREWS X. 25.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.

TO enquire into the ground and original of public worship, is both an entertaining and profitable speculation: it is entertaining, as it may help us to account for a practice that has prevailed in all ages and nations of the world; and

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and it is useful, as by this means we may learn how far, and for what reasons we are obliged to comply with it.

And first; There are some principles in human nature, which powerfully incline men to worship God in society. Mankind in general are so formed, as to feel great pleasure in real devotion. To reverence the King of heaven and earth; to adore his wisdom and goodness; gratefully to acknowledge the past, and to supplicate the future care and bounty of his Providence, are delightful employments to every pious mind. The pleasures which flow from these exercises are not inconsiderable, when they are enjoyed in private; but being shared with others, they become far more exalted and ravishing. It is then the devout passions arise in us with the greatest ardor, and are attended with the most exquisite delight, when we observe the expressions of them in the words, countenance and gesture of those about us. Our own devotion is kindled or encreased by that of others, and the satisfaction we take in it heightened by considering that numbers are partaking with us of the same entertainment. Upon these accounts we may

may venture to assert, that mankind are naturally disposed to join together in divine worship; and, that supposing neither God nor man had made any laws about it, it would have been no more extraordinary, if they had assembled for this purpose, than for the enjoyment of any other pleasures.

But in almost all nations, law-givers and magistrates have encouraged this propensity of mankind to religion. It was easily understood, that piety was a main support of justice; and that the sense of a Supreme Power, the inspector of human affairs, the avenger of wrong, and the patron of virtue, had a manifold tendency to strengthen the bonds of society; to restrain men from secret wickedness; to check the insolence of the great, and tame the wild passions of the people. No wonder then, if in all well-regulated policies, the public should have interested itself about religion, in which its welfare is so nearly concerned. Temples were every where built; rites and ceremonies espoused; an order of men appointed to preside and officiate in sacred things; and certain days fixed, when the people should assemble for religious

religious purposes. Indeed as to the objects, and manner of worship, less care than ought to have been, was generally taken. The magistrate was content to authorise the current belief, though ever so absurd and ridiculous; and to recommend those gods and ceremonies which the people were best disposed to receive. It was thought sufficient, it seems, if by public and solemn acts of religion, a general sense of some over-ruling powers could be impressed and frequently renewed in the minds of men. Nor was this the only advantage gained by instituting religious assemblies: the people by thus joining in one common worship, were put in mind of their relation to the state, and to one another, which contributed not a little to strengthen their affection for the public, and to promote amity, and good correspondence among them.

But in some nations this practice, so highly beneficial to mankind, was enjoined by an authority superior to that of human governors. (God himself in the system of laws he delivered to the Jews by his servant Moses, commanded them to sanctify every seventh day; abstaining

staining from the common business of life, and employing themselves chiefly in devout exercises. He also appointed other festivals, when the people were to come together from all parts, and join in the celebration of religious exercises.

And, in what concerns the observation of the sabbath, christianity confirms the Mosaical law: our Saviour, whose practice ought to be a rule to christians, attended upon the public worship in the Jewish synagogues: and the apostles followed his example, till they had gained a sufficient number of converts to christianity in one place to form a church. Then they constituted regular assemblies of christians, and set apart proper persons to instruct the people and assist them in their devotions. We find also in the writings of the apostles, which are acknowledged to be of sacred authority, frequent exhortations to join in the public worship of God: as particularly in the words I have now read to you; “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.”)

In further discoursing upon this subject, I would lay before you some arguments

ments to engage your constant attendance on divine worship in public. And,

First, Let me urge the divine command; which of itself will be an effectual inducement with every pious mind, to keep the sabbath, and reverence the sanctuary. Add to this: the laws and institutions of our country; which next to the authority of God, ought to be held in the highest veneration. For, though under our present happy government we are allowed to worship God according to our consciences, yet we are not left to our own choice, whether we will attend his worship at all, or not. It is pity indeed, the useful laws relating to this, are not more strictly executed, and that greater care is not taken to punish the violators of them. But an honest man, and a lover of his country, will pay a sacred regard to the injunctions of the public, even when he might transgress them with impunity; and will not need to be awed into a compliance by the threatnings and rod of the magistrate.

Despise not therefore the joint authority of God and man, by neglecting to attend on the public offices of devotion.

And

And if you consider how many, and what great advantages arise from hence to society; you will be in less danger of indulging yourself in such a criminal negligence. Were piety towards God utterly banished from the earth, it is a question, whether fidelity and justice would be able to stay long behind. It is certain, wickedness might then go boldly to work whenever it could escape human observation. Oaths would be insignificant: the mutual confidence between the people and their governors would be very much diminished, if men were released from all apprehensions of a Superior Being, to whom they are accountable. Nay, I know not whether in that case a man could safely trust his friend, or a guest be secure from those that entertain him. Thus, if religion were taken away, human life would be thrown into confusion, and the bonds of society weakened, if not quite dissolved. And how is religion to be maintained and cherished? By what means can a sense of God and Providence be more effectually propagated, and diffused among the generality of the people, than by their meeting together at stated times, and

joining in solemn acts of worship? Our public assemblies, our temples, our ministers, though sometimes represented as useless burdens to the state, contribute more than any thing to keep piety alive in the world, and to spread the knowledge both of natural and revealed religion. Since then society could not well subsist without religion; nor a general sense of religion be maintained without the public worship of God, it is evidently the part of every good citizen to encourage it, as much as possible, by his influence and example.

Wherefore, if you absent yourself habitually from public worship, you cannot answer it to your neighbour, to mankind, to your country. By such a neglect also you but ill consult your own advantage or pleasure: for nothing is at once more agreeable and improving to the mind, than sincere and fervent devotion. Do you desire to be made wiser and better? Would you grow in that virtue which is the only source of peace in life, hope in death, and happiness for ever? The best advice I can give is this; go to church, and attend on the public institutions of religion as often as necessity

necessity and the great duties of life will permit you. Here, if you apply yourself with sincerity and diligence to the solemnities of devotion, you will find that to worship God in the assemblies of the people is by no means an unprofitable employment.

While you join heartily in adoring the most perfect and best of beings, your own mind will be insensibly wrought into a likeness to that character, which you admire and worship. To acknowledge him, as the universal parent, will remind you of the near relation you bear to mankind, and strengthen the principles of humanity and benevolence. By reviewing his goodness to you, and to all men, you will cherish in your breast the noblest sentiments of love and gratitude towards him: and when you pour out your soul in fervent prayers, you will improve in that resignation to providence and trust in God, which will support you in afflictions, and enable you to pass through life and death with serenity and chearfulness. The frequent repetition of these exercises will inspire you with such a sense of the divine inspection and presence, as will be the surest guard to your innocence

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and virtue, at all times, and in all places.

Thus every part of devotion is calculated to refine the temper, and mend the heart: as it enobles, and exalts human nature, so it demonstrates in the strongest manner its original excellence and dignity. The capacities of which we are apt to boast, are in some measure common to us, and the brute creation. In the inferior animals, we may observe some spark of reason, though not so perfect as our own: they are also many of them led by the instincts of nature to herd and associate with one another. Wherefore, the brutes are in a certain degree rational and social as well as men: but they are all of them utterly incapable of religion. This it seems was reserved to be the distinguishing glory of man; that he alone, of all earthly beings, should be capable of knowing and worshipping the sovereign mind, in common with the angels.

Let therefore the usefulness and dignity of devotion engage you to attend on its public offices. Besides, if you go to church with a real desire to be instructed, you may there improve in the best and most profitable knowledge. By hearing the

the word of God read and preached, you may grow in that wisdom which leads to a good behaviour in this world, and to everlasting happiness in the world to come. To this you may object, that you can read the scriptures at home; and perhaps you have conceived such high thoughts of your own wisdom, and such a mean opinion of pulpit-instructions, that you despair of reaping much benefit by them. Now far be it from me to call in question your understanding and knowledge. I will even suppose that with less opportunity and leisure for improvement you are in fact much wiser than your ministers: but then I assert, that this circumstance is so far from justifying your absence from the church, that it even affords a strong argument against it.

For though you are so happy as to need no instruction, there are multitudes of mankind who live in miserable ignorance; concerning whom we may say, without suspicion of vanity, that they are not so wise as their ministers. Out of pure compassion for them you ought to frequent those ordinances, from which, it may be, you cannot expect to receive

any advantage yourself. Your example will doubtless have a great influence upon them, and powerfully entice them to cast themselves into the way of instruction. They can hardly avoid making this, or the like reflection: If such a knowing man finds it worth his while to attend constantly on public worship, much more does it concern us to be there, who have so much greater room for improvement.

And indeed, after all our complaints of the profaneness of the age, it must still be confessed that the men of real sense and virtue are not wanting in their endeavours to keep religion in countenance. It has many friends, of whom it need not be ashamed; and few enemies but what do it honour by despising it. I appeal to experience. Do not the wise, the sober, the honest, the faithful in every place observe the sabbath? And as to those who are seldom seen in any religious assemblies; who, I beseech you? and what are they? Are they not the very dregs of all conditions? In high life, the vain, the empty and debauched? Among the lower sort, the lazy and profligate? Of all which it is not easy to
determine

determine whether vice hath made them profane, or profaneness hath made them vicious. So true is this, that were you to go quite through the nation, I am confident you would meet with few persons of real integrity and good sense that habitually neglect the public offices of religion.

It is therefore scandalous as well as criminal to be a stranger at the church. But perhaps the services performed there are dull and disagreeable to you. Now though devotion is in itself the most delightful employment in the world, yet I acknowledge there are some things that may render it unpleasant: as, first, if your mind is haunted by superstition, it will fill your whole life with gloom and terror; and especially the time which you spend in devotion. Or if your conscience labours with guilt, you may well be uneasy while your thoughts are directly fixed upon the all-seeing and righteous Governor of the world. Or, lastly, if you engage in religious solemnities with indifference and coldness, no wonder you find them insipid and tedious. But, if you address yourself to the worship of God with a mind free from guilt and superstition;

perstition; believing in him as the just and benevolent Father of all; if you also adore him with sincere and lively affections, your own experience will convince you that devotion is attended with a noble and exquisite pleasure. For never is the human mind in a happier state, never is it more thoroughly and sincerely pleased, than when employed in admiring what is great and beautiful: and where shall we find an object more grand than the Almighty and Eternal God; the Author of all things, who continually actuates and governs that immensity of beings we call the universe? Or, where shall we search for excellence but in him, who is the original unexhausted source of whatever is good and valuable in the whole creation? Does the view of what is beautiful in a human character inspire us with delight? And must there not result the highest pleasure from contemplating the divine, which is perfectly and supremely amiable? Is there not also a satisfaction in being grateful? In owning our obligations to a generous benefactor; in expressing our delight in his government; in celebrating his excellencies, and depending with absolute security on his favour

favour and protection? And must not the most exalted pleasures arise from acknowledging the greatest obligations to the most perfect goodness; from contemplating the infinite happiness of the Deity, and professing our grateful sense of his bounty and providence? And then, what a firm tranquility and solid joy must it give, when we think of the folly, inconstancy and viciousness of mankind, and the uncertainty of all external enjoyments, to reflect upon ourselves as ever encompassed by almighty wisdom and goodness, as ever under the care of our best friend, who, if we do not make ourselves unworthy of his favour, will conduct us safe through the wilderness of this world, to a state of perfect and eternal happiness?

Such are the elevated pleasures of devotion. Nor can we enjoy them half so perfectly when alone, as in company: for society heightens every delight! the gratifications of our senses, the melody of sounds, the fair prospects of nature, and the lower pleasures of taste; none of them yield such a lively satisfaction, when we enjoy them in solitude, as when we share them with others. In like manner

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the pleasures of religion; though they are highly satisfying to one that contemplates God in privacy and retirement, yet they yield a much nobler entertainment to him that joins with a worshipping assembly.

It is the property of a fullen and unsocial spirit, to affect a recluse and solitary life, and avoid the places of public concourse. A benevolent man, on the contrary, delights to be present in the assemblies of the people; and is pleased to see a number of his own kind met together; especially, when they are met for such valuable ends, as the worship of their common Creator, and the improvement of their own minds. And if their devotion is not of the false and gloomy, but of the free and affectionate kind, he will there gather joy from every countenance around him. The whole assembly, declaring by the chearfulness of their looks, that they take delight in their sacred employment, will reflect pleasure upon one another, and mutually give and receive a most agreeable satisfaction.

Besides, to join with our fellow-creatures in worshipping God is highly conducive

ducive to kindle or encrease our own devotion: for there is a kind of contagion in human passions. Every motion of the heart has a certain air peculiar to it; and, when we observe in others these visible signs, the affections from which they proceed naturally arise within us. Devotion therefore will be more warm, the divine enthusiasm more sensibly felt, and the elevation given to the mind be greater, when, with a numerous assembly, full of a sense of the Deity, and his Providence, we engage in his worship. If here we catch not the sacred passions, we shall have reason to complain, not that devotion is dull and unpleasant, but that our minds are insensible and stupid.

Upon the whole then it appears, that as we ought to attend on the public worship of God, out of regard to the divine command, and the institutions and welfare of civil society; so this practice is highly conducive to our own particular benefit and pleasure. Hence we shall gradually become wiser and better: enjoying at the same time a sublime satisfaction, far superior to all the delights of sense, and even to the nobler pleasures of private devotion.

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I shall only add, that devoutly to worship God in the assemblies of the people has an immediate tendency to fit us for the employments and pleasures of heaven. No sooner shall the soul have dropt this body of flesh, than all those pleasures that depend wholly upon the body must vanish of course. Wherefore it is evident, the happiness of a future state consists in nothing but in mental satisfactions: in the exercises of virtue and friendship, in contemplating the wonderful harmony of the immense universe, in admiring and praising the sovereign Mind, its former and preserver. Accordingly the scripture represents the departed spirits of good men as happy in the worship, love and adoration of the Supreme Being, whose nature and perfections they will then more thoroughly understand, than when their minds were enclosed in tabernacles of flesh. It is therefore of infinite concern that, purifying our souls from sensual inclinations, and despising all mean and transitory pleasures, we cultivate a relish for the noble and eternal enjoyments of the mind, and particularly for those of social devotion. Thus, whenever it shall please
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God to remove us out of this life, we shall be duly qualified for joining with the celestial choir of angels and saints, in celebrating his praise, through the ages of eternity. Which, that it may be the happy case of every one of us, God of his infinite mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

SER.

S E R M O N V.

THE MARKS OF RELIGIOUS SINCERITY.

2 CORINTHIANS xiii. 5.

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.

THERE are three several ranks and orders of men, into which those "that name the name of Christ," and profess his religion, may be divided. Some have nothing more than the mere name and profession of christianity, for
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in their works they deny it; "being alienated from the life of Christ," and paying no manner of obedience to his laws; but living in the open and avowed practice of all kinds of wickedness. Others there are, who as manifestly adorn the doctrine they embrace, and live up to the rule which they profess, so far as human infirmity will suffer them. They have, by the grace of God concurring with their sincere endeavours, subdued the power of their corrupt lusts and affections, so that little or no disturbance doth from thence arise to them; but they go on in the paths of virtue, and the duties of piety, evenly and regularly; glorifying God, and benefiting men, and "shining more and more unto a perfect day." And to each of these the state and condition of their own souls is known certainly and clearly. A strong conviction of guilt terrifies the one, without any offer of excuse, or hope of pardon; and the conscience of the other bears witness to their uprightness, without doubts or misgivings. Between these there is a middle state of men, who are neither notoriously evil, nor yet remarkably virtuous; neither entirely given over to work wicked-

wickedness, nor yet thoroughly confirmed in goodness; but in a doubtful, uncertain way of living, and thinking; sometimes standing firm in virtue, and sometimes failing; sometimes sinning, and sometimes repenting; sometimes hoping, and sometimes despairing.

To such as these the exhortation of the apostle in my text is directed: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves:" that is, consider your condition impartially and thoroughly, try it by the rules of the gospel; satisfy yourselves once for all, whether you be true sincere believers, such as God will accept. If you find that you are, resolve by his grace to continue such to your lives end; if you find you are not, resolve to make yourselves such, as soon as is possible. For nothing can be of more moment to you, than this knowledge, and these resolutions. "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves."

In order to assist you in this enquiry, it shall be the business of the present discourse to propose some few plain marks, or tests, by which every man, who entertains any doubts of this kind (as very
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good men sometimes do) may, if he pleases, try his own sincerity, and fully satisfy himself, whether, and how far he hath obtained the great christian perfection, which is to recommend all the rest, I mean, that of sincerity.

And first; The most obvious, and therefore the most satisfying mark of religious sincerity is, if a man, upon a review of his own thoughts, finds that his resolutions of obedience are universal and unlimited; without a reserve for any favourite sin, without excepting any particular instance of duty, wherein he desires to be excused. "Then," says the good Psalmist, "shall I not be ashamed," that is, then may I safely confide in my own innocence and uprightness, "when "I have respect unto all thy commandments;" when I find myself equally determined to obey every divine precept, and resolved to allow myself in no practice whatsoever which the law of God doth not allow of. Where this is not the case, there can be no true christian sincerity; which consists in a true bent and inclination of the will towards God; and the will is never truly, but when it is totally inclined towards him;
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when it is lost in the divine will; implicitly likes or dislikes, chooses or refuses, what God hath beforehand approved or disapproved by his holy precepts or prohibitions. Is a man said to be sincere to his friend, who betrays him in any one important secret committed to his trust, though he should be faithful in many others? Is a servant said to be sincere to his master, who hath any reserved cases wherein he resolves not to consult his honour, or interest? No more can a man be reckoned sincere towards God, who sets up any single lust, inclination, or thought, against what he knows to be the divine will and pleasure. And this is evidently the reason of that determination in St. James; "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For," as it there follows, "he that said, do not commit adultery, said also, do not kill. Now if thou commit not adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law;" that is, if thou neglectest to observe any one divine command, knowing it to be one, thou art in that instance as open and declared a rebel
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to the authority enacting it, as if thou shookest off thy obedience to all.

If then, upon a careful survey of ourselves, we find that we are heartily disposed and resolved to comply with all the terms of duty (whether grateful, or ungrateful to flesh and blood) which the gospel proposeth to us; that it is our fixt intent not to do, in any case, what God has forbidden, nor to neglect what he hath enjoined; and that there is no appetite, desire, or design so dear to us, but we are ready to part with it, as soon as its opposition to a divine command shall be made out; if this, upon examination, prove to be our case, we have great reason to think well of ourselves, and to conclude, that we are in such a state of mind, as God will accept and reward.

A second, and sure proof of religious sincerity may be drawn from a general view of the common course of our lives, and actions. If there be an even tenor of goodness visible in our conduct, a regular and steady pursuit of virtue, without any gross and notorious failures in scandalous instances, and flagrant acts of wickedness; if whenever we happen to fall

fall by some great temptation, we continue not long and quietly under the guilt of it, but recover our ground forthwith, and return to our duty; proceeding in the paths of obedience and an holy life habitually, and discharging our obligations to God and man evenly and uniformly; then may we from hence also draw a comfortable conclusion concerning the goodness of our characters, and nourish very promising hopes to ourselves of being happy in another world. It is not to be expected that while we are in the body we should live altogether free from the stains and infirmities of it. In the very best of men their passions will sometimes prevail over their reason, and the strongest sense of their duty will give way to a present temptation. A pious man may, now and then, be very cold and languid in the performance of his devotions, and very full of distractions and wanderings. A meek and good man, by some unforeseen accident, and by several conspiring circumstances, may be raised up into an unbecoming pitch of anger and resentment. A temperate man may through importunity, or for want of a due regard
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over himself, be gradually and insensibly betrayed into some degree of excess. But then, in all these cases, the person falling quickly recovers himself again; the fit is short, and soon over, and is succeeded immediately by shame and remorse, by new resolutions, and more vigorous endeavours. Consider the man altogether, and you will find that the general current of his behaviour bears witness to his integrity, though he fail now and then in particular instances. And God, who sees all our actions at once, will judge us upon the whole view, and not single out our worst qualities, without any regard to the best, in order to exercise his severity upon us. Let no man therefore too hastily, and too severely condemn himself for frequent infirmities, slips, and neglects; let no man, who would judge aright of his spiritual estate, fix his eye too intently on some particular blemishes and failings, of which perhaps he is conscious; but let him look, rather to the main scope and drift of his thoughts, words, and actions; and by that let him try himself, as by the justest measure and standard of sincere goodness. How contrary to this is the conduct of
many

many good and pious souls! How usual is it for persons well advanced in piety, when they are making such enquiries as these, to dwell altogether on their defects and miscarriages, without regarding the regular course of a virtuous and well-ordered life; and to condemn themselves as false and insincere, because they are not perfect and sinless! God forbid, that these should be the terms upon which we are to be dealt with! For where then would be the man upon earth, who could undergo the scrutiny? "If thou, Lord, shouldest be extreme to mark what is done amiss, O Lord, who may abide it?"

A third sign and test of sincerity is, if a man be not content with any determined proportion of goodness, nor willing to sit down at such a point of virtue as he hath already attained, without aiming at a further degree of eminence. For "the path of the just is as the shining light," says the wise man, "shining more and more unto a perfect day:" that is, the truly good are always aiming to be better, and how far soever they have run in the race of virtue, still urge on-ward incessantly and eagerly;

eagerly ; “ forgetting those things which
“ are behind, and reaching forth unto
“ those things which are before, they
“ press towards the mark for the prize
“ of the high calling of God in Christ
“ Jesus.” A soul truly touched with
the sense of its own sins and unworthi-
ness, and of the infinite mercies and con-
descension of God towards us, will never
restrain and bound itself in its returns ; but
will endeavour to love as much, and to
obey as far as is possible. Let its attain-
ments be what they will, yet it knows,
that they are short, extremely short of its
obligations ; that the measures of grace
which we arrive at here, are only ear-
nests, and spurs, and helps towards larger
communications and higher improve-
ments ; and therefore that a man is never
so good as he ought to be, who doth not
heartily desire and design to be as good
as he can be ; and breathe and pant after
perfection itself, even in this life, though
he be satisfied, that it is not fully attain-
able, but in another ; since withal he is
satisfied, that the more uniformly and
vigorously he presses towards the mark
of perfection in this life, the nearer still
shall he approach to it, though he shall
never

never reach it; and the nearer he is towards reaching it here, the more glorious shall be his crown, and the more exalted his state of perfection hereafter. And therefore, if any one find himself inclined to circumscribe his practice within such or such limits of duty, beyond which he never intends, nor expects to go; to hold fast the pleasures of life, and to enjoy as much of them as ever he can, consistently with the principles of religion; arguing always for the utmost extent of his christian liberty, and desiring to make his obligations as narrow as may be; such an one hath reason to conclude that he is as yet short of those qualifications, which are necessary to recommend him to the Judge of all hearts, and Discerner of spirits.

A fourth mark or test by which a man may discover whether he be sincerely religious or not, is, to examine himself whether he be as inclinable to exercise the graces and virtues of the christian life in private, as in public; without doing any thing merely for the applause or fear of men; but under a conscientious regard to Him that "seeth in secret," and under an expectation that He, who

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" seeth

“feeth in secret, will,” at the great day of account, “reward him openly.” For example, let a man consider whether he be as punctual and exact in performing his closet-devotions, as in repairing to the public offices of the church, and as uneasy under the omission of the one, as the other; and when he prays in private, whether he be as composed, and reverent, and devout in his behaviour, as he is when the eyes of a great assembly are upon him. Again, as to points of mercy, generosity, and justice, let him reflect, whether he be as ready to give alms in private, as in the streets; to defend the cause of the injured and oppressed, and to support a good man’s reputation in such circumstances, when he is sure never to hear of it again, as he would be if all the world heard, and observed him. Finally, whether he be as loath to defraud his neighbour in a great matter, or a small, when he might do it securely without fear of discovery; as he should be, if he were sure to be arraigned in a court of judicature for it. He that can truly answer these questions to his own satisfaction, hath no great reason to distrust his sincerity; and he who cannot,

not, hath as little reason to depend upon it.

Hypocrisy, when in perfection, will act real goodness so well, and put on the shape and disguise of it so exactly, as to deceive even him who plays the part, as well as those who look on, and create a belief in him that he is what he seems to be; till he compares himself with himself, his private with his public conduct: and that touchstone never fails to distinguish true from counterfeit piety; for the surest indications of men's characters are those actions and discourses which flow from them when they are off their guard, and under no awe or restraint from the eyes and observation of others.

A fifth thing by which sincerity in religion manifests itself is, when a man appears to act, not from selfish ends and private interest, but out of a true zeal for the honour of God, the interest of virtue, and the good of mankind. Would you satisfy yourself whether you sincerely love such a relation, such an acquaintance, such a friend? Consider, do you on all occasions design to promote what is for their service and reputation? do you heartily desire and endeavour their

good, without having an immediate eye on your own advantage in it? If you do, it is certain that your friendship and affection are sincere; for no man can give better proofs and assurances of it. And the case is the same with respect to God and religion. If a man feels himself inwardly warmed and actuated by a true concern for the glory of God, for the honour of his name, and of his worship; if he be apt to undervalue worldly regards, and petty private views, in comparison of this great end; if in evil days, when the manners of men are extremely corrupted, he is not ashamed to act up to strict principles of virtue which are not in fashion, nor is remiss in the practice of those duties which he foresees will scarcely turn to account; espousing firmly and unalterably the cause of God and goodness, even when hundreds on his right hand have gone off, and thousands have revolted on his left: in a word, when a man may be licentious with the general applause of the world, and cannot be otherwise without being despised and pitied; and yet is so far from being tempted to a compliance, that he doth what he can to stem
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the torrent of impiety, and to make his virtue as conspicuous as other men's vices: when a man, I say, doth upon reflection find himself thus resolved and qualified, he hath great reason to be pleased with his condition, and to conclude that it is well-pleasing to God also: for there is no surer mark of integrity than a courageous adherence to virtue in the midst of a general and scandalous apostacy. Which is the reason that Noah and Abraham, Lot and Daniel have so high an encomium bestowed on them in scripture, and are recommended as patterns of a strict, uncomplying uprightness, to all succeeding ages.

These are the several marks or tests, by which we may examine ourselves whether we are in the faith, whether we are possessed of that truly christian sincerity which God above all things requires. Let us do it honestly and impartially; let us apply the rules which have been given, and take an estimate of the true state and condition of our souls, by the means of them. If, upon a strict enquiry, we find that our hearts are right with God, let us give him the praise, and resolve

by his grace and blessing to keep them so, "all the while our breath is in us, "and the spirit of God is in our nostrils;" and endeavour to grow in this faith, and to increase in this grace more and more, "till we come in the unity of "the faith, and of the knowledge of the "Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto "the measure of the stature of the fulness "of Christ." But if, after a serious review of our lives and consciences, it appears that they are not such as will strictly bear the test; let us form immediate resolutions of working ourselves up into those degrees of sincerity which we want, and of being as holy and blameless as we ought to be, "in all manner of conversation."

SER

S E R M O N VI.

DIVERSITY OF OPINION NO JUST
CAUSE OF DISCORD.

JOHN iv. 9.

*For the Jews have no dealings with the
Samaritans.*

THE disagreement between the Jews
and the Samaritans, occasioned by
different sentiments of religion, and dif-
ferent places of divine worship, was
raised to such a height, as to break off,

in a great measure, all intercourse between them, and put a stop to the offices of common humanity. Excepting the case of commerce, tolerated by consent, they mutually avoided correspondence, and treated each other as Barbarians, or something worse. Hence we find the woman of Samaria in no little surprize, that our Saviour being a Jew, should apply to her for "water to drink." Accordingly she expostulates the matter with him, and enquires how it came to pass. "How is it," says she, "that thou being a Jew, askest drink of me who am a woman of Samaria?" Adding, in the words of the text, "for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans." In discoursing on which, it is not my intention to enlarge on this particular case; but rather to take an occasion from hence of considering that general propensity in mankind which produced it, and which we find continually operating in the same way, in all times and places, and even among christians; though discountenanced and condemned by the first principles, and clearest precepts both of reason and revelation. The propensity which I speak of, is that of
men's

men's breaking loose from the bonds of humanity, and cherishing discord and disaffection, merely on account of differences of opinion, especially in matters of religion. In general, nothing more frequent and familiar, than to observe what animosities are daily kindled by the opposition of men's sentiments and speculations. But in respect of religious ones, the effect is notorious, and the grievance almost universal. Whatever be the meaning of it, we seem all to expect that others should think as we do, and subscribe to our principles and persuasions. And whenever this expectation fails, as fail it must perpetually; our affection is apt to cool, and our good will to abate, in proportion to the difference. Whoever judges in his own way, and rejects ours, is, at least, looked upon with a suspicious eye, and forfeits some share of our esteem. But very often he becomes an object of our high displeasure, and is numbered among our worst enemies. Without any other offence given, than thinking differently from us, and following the conclusions of his own understanding; he grows so very obnoxious, that we oftentimes shun him, and

refuse to have any dealings with him. Instead therefore of confining our thoughts to the particular fact spoken of in the text, it may be proper to extend them to all that are of the like nature. Such an inhuman way of proceeding being general and common, should be considered and treated of accordingly. Since men of all religions are more or less faulty in this respect, as well as Jews and Samaritans; instead of pointing our censures at them, it behoves us all to take part of the blame; to plead guilty ourselves, and provide, if possible, a suitable remedy. I shall therefore endeavour, in the first place, to give some account of this strange appearance; secondly, shew the unreasonableness and iniquity of such a proceeding; and, thirdly, take notice of the pernicious consequences which flow from it.

First; I am to give some account of this strange appearance. For indeed, however common it be, it is a strange one; as we must acknowledge, if we fairly consider it. We are offended at our brethren; think and speak ill of them; and practise hostilities against them. Why, what have they done?

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They have, it seems, presumed to differ from us in opinion, and followed their own judgments instead of ours. Does this reason deserve the name of a reason? Is it not rather a most ridiculous pretence; and does it not appear such at first sight? But of this more afterwards. In the mean time, let us briefly enquire into the true cause of this proceeding. For unless we discover the cause, it will be in vain to think of a cure. On what grounds then can we fix it, or to what principle ascribe it? Is it owing to our love of truth, and our zeal and concern for the support of it? Such a principle, if sincere and genuine, would operate a quite contrary way. Admitting our opinions to be as just and true, as we suppose them to be; how are they to be maintained, promoted, and propagated? By ill will, or good will; by hatred, or love; by injuries and reproaches, or kind usage, and gentle treatment? If we would recommend our opinions effectually, we must procure them a fair hearing: and in order thereto, must appear well-affected to those whom we are endeavouring to convince. If, on the contrary, we discover any signs of enmity

and disaffection; will not men be naturally prejudiced against all the arguments that we can urge? Will they not suspect, and that justly, that we are influenced by motives very different from what we pretend? In short, whoever has a real regard for truth, and is desirous to promote its interests, must and will follow methods quite contrary to what we are speaking of. He will find it necessary to correspond with men of different persuasions fairly and friendly; and, in all his dealings, to proceed with humanity, equity, and candor. He will be so far from exasperating their minds by malevolence, or contempt; that he will strive to conciliate their good will, and cultivate their esteem, by a willing discharge of all such good offices as may reasonably be expected from him. This plea then is a mere pretence; and can never be thought sufficient either to justify such a practice, or account for it. Can it then be any way referred to a pious concern for the glory of God? May we suppose that men are impatient of opposition, and zealous for their opinions, from a strict regard for the doctrines of religion, and in order to preserve them

them in their original purity? However this may be alledged, it seems very difficult to find the connexion. Let the pure doctrines of religion by all means be guarded and maintained as carefully as may be: but how is this to be done? Will animosity go further than argument, or reproaches have a better effect than fair reasoning. If we judge that our neighbour has erred and strayed from the paths of truth; must we needs fall out with him, in order to reduce him? Will our treating him angrily or scornfully make him more attentive to instruction, or more open to conviction? Will he not rather be apt to conclude that our passions and dispositions are more faulty than his faith, and more irregular than his judgment? As "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God," so it is the most improper instrument in the world for the maintenance of his truth. So far is it from being conducive to the support and protection of sound doctrine, that it is much more likely to shake and subvert it. And supposing it otherwise, it is at best a very hard supposition that God should ever be glorified by such measures as are repugnant to

to charity and humanity, and contrary to the principles both of nature and religion. But indeed such a conduct answers neither purpose; as being no less injurious to truth, than it is to peace and good will. And as to the advancement of public good, there can be no room at all for such a pretence. So far from it, that the very reverse must naturally follow; as I shall have occasion to observe under another head. To promote and propagate what we believe to be truth by amicable methods is undoubtedly a real service to the public; but strife, and variance, and uncharitable proceedings are the very bane of human society. Since then the behaviour we are speaking of is not to be accounted for by the forementioned suppositions, where shall we search for the true source of it? To what cause, or what principle, may it justly be ascribed? To none, I fear, that is praise-worthy, or even innocent: nay to none but what is highly blameable, and what we are or ought to be, greatly ashamed of. For the plain truth is, that it springs from pride, vanity, and immoderate self-love: nothing else is sufficient to account for it, or capable of

of producing it. Being swelled with a high conceit of our own opinions, because they are our own; our attachment to them becomes so strong, that every opposition is apt to give us pain, and become an object of our displeasure. We look upon it as an offence, and an injury; and too often resent it accordingly. Hence, in a great measure, proceed those rigorous judgments, and rugged dealings, which have so often appeared even among christians; to the dishonour of our holy religion, and indeed the reproach of human nature. An intemperate fondness for our own notions, set off and sanctified by specious names, has not only laid waste our charity, but often made us violate the first principles of humanity and common justice. This will further appear if we go on to consider, in the

Second place, the unreasonableness and iniquity of such a proceeding. By the law of nature, by all the rules of reason and religion, every man has a right to our good-will; of which right nothing can ever deprive him, whatever his character or conduct may be. And not only to our good-will is he entitled, but even
to

to our esteem; till he forfeit it by misbehaviour and demerit. If we entertain a hard thought, and unfavourable opinion of any man, without grounds; we are manifestly unjust and injurious. Let it then be considered whether any disagreements or differences of opinion be a just ground for dislike, a real forfeiture of our esteem. Now this is so far from being true, that it is utterly impossible. And the reason is, because no man's opinions or persuasions are in his own power, or subject to his will. He must believe as he can; and is under a necessity of judging if he judge at all, according as the evidence of things appears to him. He may indeed misapply and pervert his faculties; so may we; but in either case this is impossible to be known, excepting by God and a man's own conscience. Supposing then, what ought always to be supposed in such a case, that other men use their faculties, and exercise their judgments, as fairly and uprightly as we do; they may still differ from us, and perhaps widely: I ask, what is the offence, or where shall we fix the blame? Shall we accuse men of faults not voluntary; or lay to their
change

charge things unavoidable? Are men to answer for those operations of the mind wherein they are entirely passive; and which they can no more alter, than they can change the very frame of their nature? If they have carefully sought the truth, and sincerely followed the best light they could get, they are innocent in the sight of God, and even secure of his acceptance, whatever errors they may have fallen into. But men, it seems, are not so easily satisfied. So hard and unreasonable we are, that we take offence where none is either given or meant. If our neighbour's thoughts are not as our thoughts, and his principles conformable to ours; he incurs our ill opinion, our indignation, our censures: we condemn him oftentimes without mercy, and would punish him if we could. Has he done us any wrong, or committed any fault at all? Not any; and in truth we might as well, and with as good reason, quarrel with him for the difference of his looks, and features, as the difference of his opinions. Both are alike involuntary, and entirely out of his power and choice.

But further; let us suppose that it was in his power to come into our way of think-

thinking; why should he not use his own liberty as well as we? He differs no more from us than we do from him: and, by consequence, if there be any fault committed, any offence made; it is mutual, and belongs to both alike. He has as good a right to direct and dictate to us, as we to him; or if our pretensions reach any further, we should make out our claim. Do we pretend to set up our sentiments as a common standard? Or would we, in resemblance of a noted tyrant, reduce all men's understandings to the model and measure of our own? If we presume, and take it for granted, that we are in the right, and others in the wrong; what hinders them from making the same supposition in favour of themselves? And whether it be made by one, or the other; assurance and confidence are by no means certain marks of truth. But let it be supposed that truth is actually on our side; what follows? Only this; that till other men are convinced of it, we cannot expect their concurrence. And in order to convince them, let any man judge whether cool arguments, and candid instructions, be not much more

more likely means, than either bitter reproaches, or contemptuous neglect. But does not the scripture seem to countenance severe and rigorous proceedings, in respect of those who corrupt the doctrines of religion? Are we not required to "mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the apostolic doctrine?" And "if any come and bring not such doctrine;" are we not expressly forbid to "receive them," or even shew them common civilities? I answer, that if the persons here spoken of had been only chargeable with erroneous opinions, and false doctrines; and their characters clear in other respects; these directions about them would not easily have been accounted for. But the truth is, as the best interpreters allow, that their practice was as corrupt as their faith could be; and their conduct not only immoral, but infamous and profligate. The apostle expressly mentions their evil deeds; and there is good reason to believe that their misbehaviour was notorious. What wonder then if he warned the faithful against such licentious men, and would have them generally marked and discountenanced? But can
any

any instance be produced, where persons of a good moral character are either treated by our Saviour or his apostles, or ordered to be treated by others with rigour or severity, merely on account of their errors, whether small or great? If no such instance is to be found, as may securely be affirmed, vain are all endeavours to seek patronage in the gospel for such proceedings as are directly contrary to the true spirit and design of it, as well as the tenor of its precepts. However the maintainers of immoral doctrines and wicked principles may be there branded; yet great lenity and indulgence are ever shewn to mere errors of judgment, and the mistakes of well-meaning men. In short, the disposition we are considering is inhuman and unjust; and therefore is, and must be, equally condemned by reason and revelation. Nothing indeed is more opposite to the true genius of christianity, or the example and practice of its great Author; whose gentleness and meekness were never to be exhausted by the most injurious actions; much less by involuntary failings, and invincible mistakes. Whenever we find his zeal exerted in sharp admonitions, and warm reproofs;

reproofs; we are sure there is real guilt, and that of the worst sort. But opinions and judgments simply erroneous never offended him; and we may safely say, never will.

The third particular which I proposed, is briefly to take notice of the pernicious consequences of the practice here complained of; which, in the first place, may be considered as producing public evils of the highest malignity. To this has been owing a great share of those calamities and miseries which have so cruelly and constantly infested the christian world. From this fountain have flowed not only bitter waters, but streams of blood in every age: inquisitions, persecutions, martyrdoms, murders, massacres, are, in a great measure to be placed to the account of this intolerant, unchristian spirit. A considerable part of the best and worthiest of mankind have fallen victims to this barbarous principle; and most of our histories are blackened with the horrid cruelties occasioned by it. Even where it has operated in a milder and more moderate way, it has produced much mischief, and a great variety of troubles, and inconveniences.

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The chief blessings of society it has corrupted and poisoned; robbed men of their mutual affection, benevolence, and esteem; infused jealousies, kindled contentions, and spread variance and discord far wide; it has divided friends, families, kindred; crumbled communities into parties and factions; and burst asunder the strongest bonds and obligations both natural, civil, and religious: in short, it has disturbed and damaged the public in numberless respects, and frequently introduced general disorder and confusion.

Again; if we consider its private effects, and how it operates on the minds of those who harbour it; we shall find it no less mischievous and fatal within, than it is without. It perverts their understandings, corrupts their judgment, and alienates their affections; it confounds their ideas of merit and demerit, and makes them estimate characters by false rules, and fallacious measures; it creates uneasy and vexatious sentiments, and sheds into their breasts the corroding venom of ill will; it supplants mens' graces and good dispositions, and plants evil habits in their room; it feeds that vanity from which it springs, and nourishes presumption, confidence,

confidence, and self-conceit; in a word, it kills the kind instincts of humanity and compassion, and sometimes pulls them up by the very roots. And what enjoyment, what peace or tranquility of mind is to be expected, where so malignant a principle has taken hold, and fixed itself to any depth? A principle so unnatural and perverse; so injurious to virtue, and by consequence destructive of happiness; that it may justly be looked upon as a great curse to its possessors, as well as to the public.

Lastly, a further evil attending it is the discredit and dishonour which it does to religion; against which many men are easily prejudiced; and perhaps no way more, or sooner, than this. Christianity, in particular, ever suffers, and that greatly, through this very misconduct. Candor and charity are the chief characteristic of christians; their peculiar ornament, and noblest distinction. And whenever it is sacrificed to mere opinions, and points of speculation, the blame is apt to be misapplied and transferred, and the profession itself charged with the faults and follies of its professors. The gospel grants all due freedom, and every innocent liberty; and
not

not only so, but requires men to stand fast therein. On the contrary, many christians provide chains and fetters, and oblige men to put them on. Let the adversaries of our religion consider how they direct their accusation, and fix their charge: most evident it is how they ought to fix it. Private judgment is not only our privilege, but our duty; not only permitted, but enjoined by Christ and his apostles. What dishonour then, what indignity do christians offer to their sacred institution, when, instead of encouraging private judgment, they pluck it out of men's hands, and place implicit faith in its room! When, instead of leaving them at liberty to interpret scripture, and judge for themselves, they tie them down to the doctrines and explanations of frail and fallible guides!

Upon the whole; if we have any regard to plain reason, and natural equity; if we wish peace and prosperity either to our fellow-creatures, or ourselves; if we have any concern for the glory of God, and the honour of his dispensations: let us not presume to exercise dominion over other men's faith, or take any steps towards oppressing their understandings, or
impair-

impairing their liberties. Let us grudge no man the possession of those rights which nature has given him, and the gospel has confirmed to him; ever remembering that divine rule of "dealing with others, as we would be dealt with ourselves." In order hereto, let us carefully guard against all excesses and irregularities of self-love; resist the impulses of vanity; and check betimes the desires of domination. Let the love of equity and probity prevail in our minds; and let us maintain and cherish sobriety of thought, and humility of spirit. "Above all," let us "put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness, the end of the commandment," and the very essence of the gospel.

S E R M O N VII.

AGAINST NEEDLESS CURIOSITY.

JOHN xxi. 22.

*Jesus saith unto him, if I will that he
tarry till I come, what is that to thee?
Follow thou me.*

IN the beginning of this chapter, our
Lord appearing to his disciples after
his resurrection, and making himself
known to them by a miraculous draught
of fishes, takes that occasion to give a
particular

particular admonition to Peter, to be as diligent for the time to come in propagating the doctrine of Christ, as he had in time past been faulty in denying of Christ himself. For which reason he repeats his question no less than three times successively; "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" till Peter was grieved at it; and his heart smote him with regret, at the justness of the reproof, and at the earnestness of the threefold repetition. Yet at the same time it could not but be matter of comfort to him, and an assured token of his repentance being accepted; that our Lord was pleased, in so particular and distinct a manner, to enquire into the sincerity of his love, and to lay upon him such a repeated command to "feed his flock." After having given this command to Peter to "feed his sheep;" immediately he proceeds in the very next words, to foretel what sufferings Peter himself likewise should undergo. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest;" (alluding to the readiness wherewith Peter, "when he heard that it was the Lord, girt his fisher's coat

“coat about him, and cast himself into
 “the sea;”) “But when thou shalt be
 old,” saith he, “thou shalt stretch forth
 “thy hands, and another shall gird thee,
 “and carry thee whither thou wouldest
 “not;” that is, should carry him to be
 crucified. Upon this, “Peter turning
 “about, and seeing the disciple whom
 “Jesus loved, following them; he saith
 “to Jesus, ‘Lord, and what shall this
 “man do?’” The question was a matter
 of mere curiosity; and therefore our
 Lord answers it accordingly in the words
 of the text; “If I will that he tarry till
 “I come, what is that to thee? Follow
 “thou me.”

Modern expositors have imagined, that
 our Lord by these words meant to fore-
 tel that St. John should live till after the
 destruction of Jerusalem, which they
 fancy is sometimes stiled “the coming of
 Christ.” In the apostles’ days, the same
 words were understood by some of the
 disciples as a prediction that St. John
 should not die at all, but should conti-
 nue alive till the day of judgment; which
 those, who thus understood the words,
 in all probability apprehended to be
 much nearer than it was. “Then went

“ this saying abroad among the brethren,
“ that *that* disciple should not die.” Yet
Jesus said no such thing, as that *that*
disciple should continue alive, either till
the destruction of Jerusalem, or till his
final coming to judgment, or to any o-
ther determinate time ; but only that it
concerned not Peter to enquire at all,
what the Divine Providence had thought
fit to determine concerning his fellow-
disciple. It was foretold to Peter for
particular reasons, that he himself should
die a martyr: possibly to support and
comfort him under the uneasy thoughts
of his having before so shamefully denied
his Master: possibly also for a contrary
reason, to humble him, and keep him
from being puffed up with the pre-emi-
nence that seemed in some manner to be
given him above the rest of the disciples:
or for any other reason which the wisdom
of God thought proper. But as to that
other disciple, says our Lord ; whether
he also shall die by the hands of violence,
or whether he shall die a natural death,
or how and when he shall die, or whe-
ther he shall die at all ; “ what is that to
thee ? Follow thou me.”

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The words of the text being thus explained; the observations naturally arising from them, are briefly as follows.

First; That every person, in every station of life whatsoever, wherein the Providence of God thinks fit to place him, has always some plain and certain duty, which it is his present proper business to attend to. "Follow thou me." Attend, says our Lord, to the doctrine which I am now teaching you; that, when I am ascended into heaven, you may instruct others therein with fidelity and diligence, which is "feeding my sheep." This was St. Peter's duty, at the time of our Lord's speaking these words to him: and the admonition is recorded, as the rest of our Saviour's discourses were, upon account of the universality and perpetuity of its application. It was not in one single case only, that our Lord gave this intimation; "What I say unto you, I say unto all, watch:" but, in general, the same was to be understood in almost all his instructions. "Follow thou me," is an admonition to every man, at all times and in all places, and in every circumstance of life, to be intent upon his pro-

per duty, whatsoever it be. God has been pleased to distribute among men very different gifts, to each one his proper talent; and an account will be expected from every one, "according to what he hath, and not according to what he hath not." In the right use of those capacities and faculties, those abilities and opportunities, whatsoever they be, wherewith God has entrusted every particular person: in this consists that person's proper and peculiar duty. They who are endued with riches, power, and authority in the world, are, by the great weight and influence of their example, to promote justice, equity, and charity among mankind. They who are poor and afflicted, have a particular call to the virtues of patience and contentment; which, in their proper place, do no less truly and effectually promote the glory of God, than the more conspicuous virtues of those in higher stations. Those who have learning and knowledge, are to spread the light of truth with fidelity and diligence, and to apply the arguments of uncorrupt religion and the motives of virtuous practice, with all the clearness and strength they
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are able. And those of the lowest and meanest capacities, even the most ignorant of all, have still a plain way of duty before them; to adhere stedfastly to those few truths they know, those most important truths which no man can innocently be ignorant of: "Living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world," because "God has appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness:" and taking heed not to be imposed upon with things they cannot understand; by which the world has been led into the inextricable labyrinth of endless and unintelligible superstitions. Before the will of God was made clear by revelation, the light of nature was men's guide, and the obligations of right reason were the rule of their duty and their guard against superstition. Since that time, whosoever has had the doctrine of the gospel reasonably and credibly proposed to him, to him does our Lord say, as to St. Peter in the text, "Follow thou me." He is in general to follow Christ, in the universal practice of all christian virtues; and in particular he is to attend to that proper and peculiar duty, whatsoever it be,

which is the right use of those talents wherewith Providence has entrusted him.

This is the first observation I would draw from the words of the text: that every person, in every station of life whatsoever, wherein the Providence of God thinks fit to place him, has always some plain and certain duty, which it is his present proper business to attend to: "Follow thou me."

The second thing observable in the words of the text, is; that when Peter put a question to our Lord, upon a matter which did not at all relate to his own proper and particular duty; the answer our Lord gives him, ("what is that to thee? Follow thou me;") is such an answer as he constantly gave at all other times to any of his disciples upon any similar occasion. It was his general method, through the whole history of the gospel; whatever discourse was raised, or whatever question was put to him, which had no relation to the particular duty of the persons that proposed it; it was his constant and general method, instead of satisfying their curiosity by a direct answer, to turn the discourse into an occasion either of instructing them
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in the knowledge of their duty, or of exhorting them to the practice of it. Thus, when his disciples asked him; "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" His answer is; "Watch ye, and be ye ready always; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh." When one asked him; "Lord, are there few that be saved?" instead of satisfying the person's curiosity, he exhorts both him that asked the question, and as many others as were present, to take care that they themselves be found in the number, whatever that number be: "Strive ye to enter in at the strait gate." And again: When his disciples asked him; "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" instead of naming, according to their expectation, some among themselves, who had conversed with him most intimately here upon earth, (which expectation showed forth itself particularly in the request of the mother of Zebedee's children, that "one of her sons might sit on his right hand, and the other on his left in his kingdom;") instead of this, I say, he tells them which was the

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only

only way, whereby they could attain to the kingdom of heaven at all. "Setting a little child in the midst of them," he said; "Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Thus, in general, whatever question or matter of discourse had no relation to the proper and necessary duty of the persons themselves who moved the discourse; our Lord always turned it from a matter of mere curiosity, into some real instruction or useful exhortation.

A third thing to be observed in the words of the text, is; that our Lord does here discourage in particular, a curiosity of enquiry into other men's affairs. It was upon Peter's enquiring concerning another disciple which followed him, "and what shall this man do?" that our Lord made to him the reply in the text, "What is that to thee? Follow thou me." The enquiry was innocent; and there is no reason to suppose that our Lord was angry with Peter for making it. But he was willing to take this opportunity (according to his custom upon all other occasions) of inculcating
upon

upon Peter his own duty, and of discouraging all needless curiosity concerning the affairs of others. What was innocent in St. Peter in the present case, and may in numberless instances be innocent in any man; is yet a matter which may grow into a vice, and, by becoming a habit, may lead to things very detrimental to a right temper and disposition of mind. The evil of vain curiosity does not appear at first sight, either to others, or perhaps to the person himself; but when indulged habitually, it frequently terminates in an idle, worthless, and unprofitable temper; such as is described by St. Paul: "They learn to be idle, "wandering about from house to house; "and not only idle, but tattlers also, and "busy-bodies, speaking things which "they ought not:" or, as St. Peter expresses it; "busy-bodies in other men's matters." This temper, though in itself it may seem only trifling and worthless, yet in its consequences it leads very naturally to other and greater vices; to envy, strife, contentiousness, pride, censoriousness, discontent, and numberless other troublesome and mischievous effects. Persons of this disposition are extremely
apt

apt to be continually observing "the mote in their brother's eye," while a beam remains "in their own;" that is, to be perpetually magnifying the faults of others, and altogether insensible of their own. They are very apt, either to undervalue and despise the talents and abilities wherewith God has been pleased to endue others; which is what St. Paul represents under the similitude of "the eye saying unto the hand, I have no need of thee; and again the head to the feet, I have no need of you:" or else, in the contrary extreme, they will envy and repine at the advantages that others enjoy; which is what our Saviour reproves in the parable of the labourers; "Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" The same temper it is, that moves persons of different sects to be inquisitive about the possibility of men's salvation in other communities, rather than attentive to discover and amend any errors in their own. To all such enquiries our Saviour would have replied, "What is that to thee? Follow thou me." One thing is very certain, that no man can be saved, who does not sincerely endeavour to find out the truth for himself; who

who wilfully propagates known errors; and has no solicitude to reform his own vices, and, as far as lies in his power, the vices of his companions and friends.

Lastly; As our Lord in the text expressly discourages all needless curiosity of enquiry into other men's affairs; so, by analogy, the same caution may in its application reasonably be extended likewise to a curiosity about doctrines not of importance to religion. Whatever notions do in their consequence affect the worship of the true God, or have any direct influence either in promoting or hindring the practice of true virtue and goodness among men; these indeed can never be too carefully enquired into, or too thoroughly examined. But as to speculations which are of no such consequence, the fewer of them religion is concerned with, the better. They are generally matter of contention only, and uncharitable animosity; and have brought great scandal and reproach upon religion. A fondness for determining things not at all certain, or not clearly understood; and a shame of departing from what could not reasonably be maintained; has been the ground and the support, the cause both
both

both of the rise and of the continuance of almost all the sects with which the world has been divided, and the religion of Christ dishonoured. Could men prevail with themselves to be more zealous about things confessedly of universal importance, than about the distinguishing notions of particular sects; which, in the common methods of the world, are so much the more eagerly contended for, as they are less reasonable or more uncertain: could men, I say, prevail with themselves to be less solicitous about things uncertain, and more diligent in the practice of undisputed virtues; the the state of religion in the world would soon have a different aspect; and the effect of its influence upon men's lives and manners would be unspeakably great, with respect both to the happiness of the present life, and of that also which is to come.

“ This is a faithful saying, and these
“ things ” (saith St. Paul to Titus) “ I
“ will that thou affirm constantly, that
“ they which believe in God be careful
“ to maintain good works; these things
“ are good and profitable unto men, but
“ avoid foolish questions, and conten-
“ tions,

Serm. VII. *Against needless Curiosity.* 137

“tions, and strivings about the law, for
“they are unprofitable and vain.” Con-
cerning all such questions, Christ saith
unto us, “What is that to thee? *Fol-
low thou me.*”

S E R-

Sept. VII. 1877. (1877) 107

"I have been thinking of you
very much lately and wondering
how you are getting on. I hope
you are well and happy. I am
well and happy at present."

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S E R M O N V I I I .

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF SERVING
GOD AND MAMMON.

LUKE xvi. 13.

No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.

IN these words our blessed Lord supposes and represents all men, who have it in their power to come to the knowledge of the Supreme God, as tied
and

and bound to him in the relation of servants. This being the supposition; in order to convince his followers of the great unreasonableness of pretending to be the servants of God, and yet to be the servants, together with him, of an opposite master, slaves to the riches or grandeur of this world; our Lord useth an illustration taken from common life. No servant amongst men can possibly "serve two masters," that is, two masters, with different and opposite wills; of contrary tempers, and contrary resolutions. For it will be either thus, that the servant will have a much greater inward affection and kindness for one of them, than for the other: or, supposing that he can inwardly love them both equally; yet the nature of their commands and separate interests is such, that he must often, whilst he is obeying the one, or "holding to the one," as the text expresseth it, despise, that is, neglect the commands of the other. The first affirmation is, that he cannot be supposed to love them both equally, so as to be attached to their interests equally in his inward affection and inclination: the second, that, supposing him to
love

love them both equally, yet in the execution of their contrary commands he must unavoidably neglect or despise the one, whilst he holds to, or obeys the other. From this instance of a servant amongst men, pretending in vain to serve two masters, opposite in their interests and their wills, our Lord argues, and assures his followers, that it is so with respect to God and riches, here represented as a person, or false God, set up as a master in opposition to the true God. Ye cannot serve the true God and mammon; that is, riches, or the imaginary God of wealth.

If you would now see the force of our Lord's argument extended, as it ought to be, to other points as well as riches; it may be comprehended in these three propositions. "You are all obliged by the strongest ties, and the most unanswerable reasons, to be faithful and sincere servants of the true God, to whom you owe yourselves, and all you have, and all you can hope for." Now, as it is impossible amongst men for a servant to serve two opposite masters, either affectionately or faithfully; so it is impossible for you to be the servants of the
God

God of this world, and to serve the true God faithfully at the same time. "Therefore you are obliged, if you would serve God as you ought, to renounce the service of every other master, opposite to him in interest and in will." From the text thus explained, I shall take occasion to discourse of several particulars, not foreign to the plain design of the words, nor useless to christians of these later ages.

First; I shall observe that many persons who have good dispositions, and frequently holy and warm resolutions, often please themselves with dividing their services between God and something opposite to him; and entertain a foolish opinion that, by this means, they are in a secure way, and truly his servants. For it being so, that religion hath been taught them, and the plain doctrines of it inculcated upon them from their childhood; and that, notwithstanding all the allurements or terrors of the world, virtue hath still its peculiar attractions and advantages; and that the prospect, or even suspicion of God's anger and future punishment is very terrible, and to some minds intolerable:

rable: these things, I say, being so, many persons find it impossible to root out of their minds all regard to religion. They experience a reluctance in their consciences, when they attempt it; and this reluctance gives them so much uneasiness, as rather determines them to set about some part of the work of religion, than to neglect the whole. They cannot bear the thoughts of being totally cast off by Almighty God; and of forfeiting all possible title to heaven and happiness; and of incurring certainly his wrath and displeasure. These things they cannot think of with any ease; nor can they bring their consciences to sit down quiet under the apprehension of them.

But then, on the other hand, perhaps their natural inclination leads them strongly to some particular vice or other: perhaps custom has improved this inclination, before they were enough aware of it: perhaps it brings them in a great deal of present profit and advantage, or it procures them a great deal of pleasure; or honour and pomp may attend upon it. These things are so entertaining and bewitching to some particular minds and tempers, that men are not able to bear
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the thought of parting, effectually and entirely, with what procures them so much present satisfaction. When their minds are employed upon the excellency and beauty of religion, and the good consequences of serving God truly; and are a little at leisure from the close attacks of any thing of this world; then perhaps they may come to a resolution of forsaking all for God, and a good conscience; and be vain enough to think that nothing shall move them from such resolutions. But when the season of trial comes again; and the temptation presents itself to them in all its force: they begin to think more favourably of the matter; and to imagine it no mortal crime to be influenced by it; and to give proofs, by their weakness, that they are men.

This being their case, between the motions of conscience and God's commands on one hand, and the temptations of profit, or pleasure, or honour on the other; they at last are seen to come, with calmness and a sort of serenity of mind, to divide themselves between this world and the other; between God and Mammon; and to procure themselves a sort of ease, by performing
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ing part of that service which they owe to Almighty God, (and this, to be sure, will be the part that they themselves happen to like best) whilst at the same time they never lose the view of what they propose to themselves in this vain world. All indeed do not give up themselves to the same masters. Some you may see pursuing pleasure to an immoderate degree; others, ambitious beyond all bounds; others, busying themselves in amassing heaps of useless wealth: and many of these, in their intervals, appearing before God in public worship; calling themselves his servants, and perhaps really thinking that they are so.

I come now to observe how unreasonable, and how useless this division of their service is; and how ill-grounded and vain all their hopes are, which are founded upon such a service.

And this will appear most evidently by considering what the true service of God is; and how much of our hearts and time it must unavoidably require. The great mistake of men seems to lie in their not knowing, or not attending to the true notions of God's service.

VOL. IV.

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Were it so indeed, that to serve God were nothing but to say our prayers, to call him Master, to attend upon his ordinances, to bow before him, to lift up our hands and eyes, to confess our sins, to beg his blessing, and to give him thanks: were this, or the like, all that is implied in serving God, then it is very certain that we might divide ourselves, and give the world our strength, and our heart, and our practice, whilst we serve God (as some call it) with our lips, and our bodies. We might then certainly go from our intemperance and our luxury, to our prayers and praises; we might come fresh from cheating our neighbours, and fall low before the footstool of our Master; we might come from our hoards of ill-gotten possessions, and be as loud as the best of our neighbours in calling God our Father, in professing our faith in him, and bowing ourselves before the throne of his mercy.

But this notion must be rooted out of men's minds. This is what God complained of under the Jewish dispensation. "This people draweth nigh to me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." You see, the worst amongst that wicked

wicked and corrupted generation of men, in which our Saviour appeared, put on the greatest shew of zeal for God and his service. Who such zealots as they, to pay tithes, to fast, to pray, and to do many other things which belonged to their religion? But what was this? or to what purpose? Their practice, their hearts (which are discovered by practice) were all another way. Mammon was their true master: because they were his true servants. The service they did to sin was visible. The world about them felt the effects of it: whilst they called that form of religion the service of God, which he assured them he abhorred and detested, when it was separated from that practical service which he indispensibly required.

For what is it, in which the service of any master upon earth consists? Is it in the calling him our master; or ourselves his servants? Is it in a formal attendance upon him, to receive his commands, or merely to know his pleasure? Is it a bare confessing of ourselves guilty of transgressing his will, and in a daily returning to ask his pardon? Will any master upon earth acknowledge this

to be service? or, will any master value or regard a man, who behaves himself thus, as his servant? Offer it now to any man, and see if he will accept of such a mock-service as this. If "I be a master," saith God by his prophet, "where is my service?" that is, if I be your master, as you pretend to call me, pay me the service due to a master: behave yourselves as that relation, which you pretend to subsist between us, enjoins and demands.

It is the part of a servant to regard the interest of his master, as his own interest; to consult the honour of his master, as his own honour; and principally, which is the only thing to judge by, to look upon his master's will, as far as a master's authority reacheth, as the guide and rule of his actions. Now, if we apply this to Almighty God, and that relation we stand in to him, as servants; we shall presently see how far the service we owe to him reacheth; how much of our time, and how much of our hearts it must of necessity take up. The interest of our great Master must be esteemed by us, as our own interest. Now, the interest of our master can be nothing but

but the encrease of all that he approves of; and the addition of as many persons as possible to his true service. Our great Master's honour is what we are obliged, as servants, to consult and regard. And this lies likewise, in the likeness of all intelligent natures to his moral perfections; and in the advancing as much as possible, the state of true virtue in the world. And, what comprehends all, our great Master's Will must be made the rule of all our actions: for they are indifferent servants indeed, who do not pay a constant and strict regard to the will of their masters. Now the will of God is every command that he hath made known to us, whether by the law of nature, which is his voice; or by the law of revelation, which is an open confirmation of that first law.

From hence, therefore, it appears that under the service of God, is comprehended the whole system of moral virtues, as well as all the external acts of devotion and worship. A part of that service, which we owe to him, is indeed external adoration; the prayers and praises of our lips, and all the expressions of dependence upon him, and universal love to others,

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which

which become such creatures as we are. But this is but one part of his service, however it may have come to be called, in general by that name. Nay, if it do not proceed from the heart and soul; if the mind and thoughts do not sincerely accompany it, and direct it all, with due affections and sentiments to him; it is indeed no part of his service, but only so many words pronounced without meaning, and so many sounds uttered for form's sake, without any effect either upon him or ourselves. Nay, and supposing the heart and soul to go along with us in these outward exercises of our religion; supposing us to be sincere in this part of God's service, and to confess, and pray, and praise, and intercede, with all the present affection that becomes the attendance of such servants upon such a master; yet, when this is done, this is but a part of his service.

There remains behind a large field of virtue. Temperance, and a command of ourselves and all our appetites; charity, or an unbounded love to all the intelligent creation; justice, or a strict regard to the dues and rights of all mankind about us; forgiveness of the greatest

est and most provoking injuries that can be offered us ; patience under all the evils of pain, sickness, loss, disappointment, that come upon us by the providence of our master ; and contentment in every station to which he is pleased to confine us ; in a word, such a behaviour and conduct in that post in which our great Master placeth us, as becomes us as servants, and as is required by the nature of it, whatever it be. All may be comprehended in the two great commandments, of “ loving the Lord our God “ with all our heart, and all our mind, and “ all our soul, and all our strength :” and of “ loving our neighbours as ourselves :” or may be summed up in St Paul’s comprehensive expression of living soberly with respect to ourselves ; righteously, with respect to our neighbour ; and piously, with respect to Almighty God.

This being then the task of God’s servants ; this being the work which every one hath to do, that hath given up his name to him ; tell me now, is there any room for other masters, opposite or contrary to him ? Can any man “ love God “ with all his heart,” and yet love an e-

nemy to God with the least degree of his affection, or the least part of his heart? Can any man, who hath such a task marked out for him; so many virtues to excel in; so many good habits to implant in himself; so many good actions to fill up every moment of his time; so strict a regard to pay to the honour of his great Master, and the commands of such a Lord: can any man, I say, in these circumstances, find any opportunity, or the least interval of time, for the service of other contrary masters; such I mean, as direct him to any instances of that sin, which is as opposite to the will of God, as darkness is to light? It is evident indeed, from the nature of the thing itself, that, in whatsoever point we decline from his service, we cease to serve him; and that as soon as we are drawn to sin, we are no longer the servants of God, but of his enemy. For "know ye not," saith the apostle, "that - to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are, to whom ye obey." And consequently, if you obey the commands of God, you are the servants of God: but if you obey those of sin, you are the servants of sin, and have departed from the service

service of God. And the service of God being the practice of all righteousness, in every instance equally; it is impossible that you should at the same time be the servants of God, and yet transgress any of the rules of that righteousness.

How vain therefore, and groundless, are the hopes of those, who pretend to divide themselves, and their services between God and this world, between duty to this Supreme Master, and any sort of vice, they themselves may see, by considering seriously what the service of God is; not a prayer, or a tear, or an act of devotion; but a continual tenor of good works; progress and improvement in all virtue. This is a service, which admits of no remission of care and diligence, and which can brook no rival. And therefore, whenever this is neglected, or broken into, a man immediately ceaseth to be the servant of that God, who cannot be truly served, unless he be served with the whole heart. The reasonableness of what hath been said under this head is so manifest, that it will make way for what I next proposed; which was

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To dissuade you from any such service to mammon, that is riches, or any other thing, or person in the universe, as will make it impossible for you to perform that service which is indispensibly due to God. For, it having appeared plainly, that it is impossible to serve, or obey, any two contrary and opposite masters; and consequently, impossible for the same man, to be the servant of mammon, and of God; the only question is, which of the two opposite masters, who contend for his service, he shall chuse for his Lord and director: whether the true God, or the false Gods of this world, pleasure, profit, or honour, that set themselves up against his right, and in opposition to his will: for one or other of these he must chuse.

Now, there is this at first thought to be said of the service of God, that the greatest part of those who are truly the servants of Mammon, or some other evil principle, know not how to throw off all regard to their rightful master; but even whilst they are serving his enemy truly, would gladly every now and then return to the service of God, in some instances or other. By this they themselves give
a remark-

a remarkable testimony that Almighty God hath a lasting, true and certain title to their service; whilst they cannot be easy in their minds without paying him some sort of service. On the other hand, all that the greatest votaries of this world can say for that sincere service they pay to their other masters, is, that inclination strongly leads them to it; that they hope it is not so bad as it seems to be; and that they design still, one time or other, to have due regard to the service of God, their true, and rightful master. But how long will such pretences satisfy reasonable creatures? Only long enough, to serve to make them miserable, when they come to see, too late, the unhappiness of that service, in which they have engaged themselves.

For this is the case: Almighty God hath such a right to your services, that is, to your obedience to all his laws, that, in the midst of your serving other masters, you are forced often to recur to his service, and to pretend to pay him some sort of obedience. Now, you have seen that this interrupted obedience, this half-duty, which is only so much as your other Lords, your lusts and passions, your co-

vetousness, or luxury, will permit you to pay him, is not truly his service; and that you cannot pretend, by such a limited and broken obedience, to prove yourselves his servants. Would you, therefore, be his servants, so as to have that reward which he hath promised to his true and faithful servants? There is an absolute necessity that you should immediately come out of the chains of other contrary Lords; that you should break their fetters; and renounce every degree of that service which Mammon or any sort of evil principle requires of you. For God's service cannot be his true service, unless it be perfectly free from all such regard to any thing else in the world, as is inconsistent with your constant regard to all his laws. His service never can be easy to yourselves till you have thus got rid of all the influences of impetuous inclination to the service of all contrary masters: nor can it be ever pleasing to him till it is that uniform, sincere, unmixed obedience, which he hath a right to, by all possible titles.

On the other hand, consider what title, what right, any other thing in the world opposite to him hath to our regards.

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What do we owe to them? Are they the first causes of our beings? Are they the primary occasions of our happiness? Will they at the end stand us in stead, against the attacks of adversity here, or the displeasure of an offended God hereafter? Are they stable, unmoveable, certain, unshaken goods? or, are we certain of always having them for our comforts and supports? or, are they not rather vain, imaginary, moveable, and transitory things; and we ourselves hastening away with a never-ceasing pace, till all correspondence with them is entirely interrupted, never to be renewed again? And are such things as these, fit to be chosen for our masters? or, is our nature such, that it can become us to make ourselves their servants? By no means: God and reason reclaim us from all approaches to such a service; God and reason which are to us infinitely more than all the world besides.

If therefore we would have God for our friend, we must chuse him first for our master; and his laws for the rules of our service. And if we would have our own reason and conscience at peace with us; we must act the part to which they direct;
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and that part is ever the service of that God, to whom we owe ourselves. Whatever hinders us from a constant application of ourselves to that service; whatever opposeth us in it, or would draw us off from it, is to be disregarded and cast from us with courage and constancy. And, it being certain that the service of sin is utterly inconsistent with the service of God; it is certain, that if we would serve God as we ought, in duty and interest, to do; we must first shake off all regard to his enemy; we must, if we think of being his servants unto all righteousness, shake off that yoke of servitude which other masters would impose upon us. And if we be truly willing to do this, there will remain nothing to hinder us from giving up ourselves to the true service of God.

His title or right to this service is indisputable. He hath created us what we are. We owe to him all we have, and all we can ever enjoy; and the very possibility of enjoying any thing. He hath bought us again into his possession, by the life and death of his Son. To him we owe
this

this fresh, and greater opportunity of making ourselves happy in his service. And how can we deny a service due on so many, and so excellent accounts? The rules of his service are his laws, by which he governs us, and to which he requires our obedience. And these are reason and light; the transcripts of his own moral perfections, which constitute his own happiness. They are the dictates of eternal truth; and every step we take in the paths of them, brings peace and joy along with it: in which they entirely differ from the laws of every other sinful principle that would draw us aside from them.

The rewards of this service (for we serve not God for nought) are inexpressible. The present reward is all that inward satisfaction which a well-disposed mind can take in the consciousness of a good and reasonable conduct; and the thought of having God's approbation. The future reward, after the service is over, is all the happiness of God's presence; or, of those more immediate communications of his love and favour which he hath promised to all his faithful servants. In the scripture-stile, by being
his

his servants, they become his sons, and by being his sons, they are adopted into the inheritance of the saints in glory.

What is it now, I pray, that can come in competition with this reasonable service? Can uncertain riches, or empty honour, or insatiable luxury pretend to any thing like this? What title can they shew to the services they claim? or, what can they produce in favour of their own right? Can they speak peace and satisfaction to the mind within? Are their laws the equitable laws of reason, and obeyed with the approbation of our consciences? or, will they entitle to any the least reward hereafter? What are their laws indeed but the hard commands of tyrants, accompanied by disquiet here, and ending in unhappiness and eternal death hereafter; flattering with images of pleasure, but leading to certain pains?

Here then let us rest, and acknowledge that it is Almighty God alone, who can justly claim us, as his servants; he alone, who hath the reward of our services in his hand, and hath power to execute what his goodness hath promised us; and he alone therefore who demands and deserves, our whole service. We cannot, we see plainly

plainly, serve him, whilst we serve other contrary masters. To him therefore without delay, without reserve, without hypocrisy, let us give up ourselves as true servants, and shew ourselves such by our sincere, constant and uniform obedience to all his holy laws; that so we may at last, with the good and faithful servant in the parable, enter into the joy of our Lord.

S E R M O N IX.

THE UNION OF WISDOM AND INNO-
CENCE.

MATTHEW X. 16.

*Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the
midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as
serpents, and harmless as doves.*

THE holy evangelist hath given us,
in this chapter, an authentic copy
of a commission given to the apostles
by our Saviour. The message which
they were to carry into all places
whither they were to go, was "peace
upon

upon earth, and good will towards men:" but the entertainment they were every where to look for, was hatred, persecution, and death. They must not hope that the sacredness of their character, and the majesty of him by whom they were sent, would secure them from indignities and wrongs: for they were to represent a despised, insulted, and persecuted Master; and from the reception which he had found, might plainly foresee what sort of treatment they were to expect. "The disciple," he tells them, "is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord: it is enough for the disciple, that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord." Naked and unarmed, they were to expose themselves to the rage of a stiff-necked, hard-hearted, and merciless people: against such they are taught to provide, and are allowed to use no other arms than wisdom and innocence.

"Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

The wisdom of the serpent might seem to include, in the notion of it, some degrees

degrees of subtilty and guile; the simplicity of the dove might be thought to intimate some defect of wariness and prudence. Our Saviour therefore requires such a temperature of both, that what was wanting in either might be supplied from the superabundance of the other; so that from their conjunction might result perfect wisdom, free from all guile; and a well-guarded innocence, without the least mixture of indiscretion.

Higher degrees of wisdom and integrity were requisite in the apostles, than are absolutely necessary to every disciple of Christ: for they were to lay the first foundations of that church, against which "the gates of hell were never to prevail." But since the church of God in all ages is best preserved by the same methods, by which it was at first established, the same qualifications of prudence and innocence, which were necessary for the planting of Christ's church, are still requisite for its support and maintainance. All who are numbered amongst the sheep of Christ, all who are in the midst of wolves, are concerned in this wholesome advice of our Saviour, "Be ye wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

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Were wisdom and innocence so closely linked together, that they were never to be found afunder; or, were they singly sufficient to the purposes of life, so that there was little or no harm from their being separated, this precept of our Saviour would be less necessary: but the ill consequences of their disunion, the expediency of their conjunction, and consequently the necessity of our observing this precept of our Lord, will evidently appear if we take a view, first, of the great mischiefs that arise from the want of wisdom in those that are harmless; secondly, of the still greater mischiefs that arise from the want of innocence in those that are wise; and, thirdly, of the great advantages that result from our being at the same time both “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”

First; Let us take a view of the great mischiefs that arise from the want of wisdom in those that are harmless.

There is so near an affinity between wisdom and goodness, that according to the notions of the moralists, prudence is an essential ingredient of every virtue; and even according to the language of
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holy writ, which is much more to be depended upon, wisdom and piety, folly and wickedness, are terms equivalent. But then this must be understood rather of the highest perfection of virtue considered in theory, than of those lower degrees of it which are to be met with in common practice. For experience assures us, that there are many persons whose hearts are sincere and upright, who make it their earnest and unwearied study "to have a conscience void of offence, both towards God and towards man;" of whom notwithstanding it must be confessed, that they do not more excel others in virtue and piety, than they are surpassed by others in sharpness of wit, in subtilty of counsels, and depth of understanding. They have wisdom sufficient to save their own souls, and to obtain eternal happiness in the life to come; but they have not circumspection enough to espy, nor all the dexterity that is necessary to escape, those manifold dangers, to which they are exposed in their passage through a wicked and deceitful world. There is in them a sweetness of nature, and tenderness of conscience, which will not suffer them to do the least injury to any;
hence

hence they are not apt to suspect any evil intentions in others towards them; and, for want of this due caution, are unprovided against the attempts of crafty and ill-designing men. They form their judgments of mankind, not from observations of what is done abroad, which these good men seldom make, but from reflections upon what passes within their own breasts, which they are much more intent upon. Hence they frame a probable opinion of the integrity of others, from what they certainly know of their own. And as it hath been observed to be a frequent error, and very familiar with wise men, to measure other persons by the model of their own abilities, and thereby often to shoot over the mark, as supposing men to project to themselves deeper ends, and to practise more subtle arts, than ever came into their thoughts; so is it a no less frequent mistake with very good men, who measure others by the standard of their own uprightness, to think of them, and to deal with them, as if they were much more honest than they truly are.

There is in good christians so great an hatred of all falshood and dissimulation,
that

that it would not only give a deep wound to their consciences, but would even do a violence to their natures, to tell a known lie; and thinking others to be framed just as they are, and to act upon the same principles as they do, they are too liable to be imposed upon by men of false tongues, and deceitful lips. Whatever is barely affirmed, is by them easily credited: what is vouched with solemn asseverations, leaves still less room in their breasts for doubt; what is confirmed by oaths, and ratified by an appeal to the omniscience, and an imprecation of the vengeance of God, hath with them all the force and credibility of a self-evident truth. And as honest and sincere christians are thus apt to lay themselves open to the practices of others, by their too great credulity; so also are they wont, through their too great freedom and openness, to discover those secrets of their own hearts, which might with a good conscience be concealed, and which cannot without prejudice be disclosed. They are so much afraid of disguising their thoughts by lying and hypocrisy, that they often want that prudent reservedness, which is no ways inconsistent with

the sincerity of a down-right honest man, or the simplicity of a good christian; they bear testimony of themselves and of their inward sentiments, even in their ordinary conversation, as if they were to give evidence upon their oaths at the bar; and deem it not sufficient to maintain the character of their veracity, that they speak nothing but what is true, unless they at the same time speak out all the truth. That "lying lips are an abomination to the Lord," is an aphorism, which never slips out of the thoughts of these honest and well-meaning persons: but they are often apt to forget that other observation of Solomon, that "a fool uttereth all his mind, but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards." For want of this prudent reserve, they heedlessly incur dangers; which, without any prejudice to their virtue, they might escape, if they would call in the succours of wisdom to their own necessary defence. Where these are not called in, men are apt to avoid one extreme by running into another, which, though not equally sinful, may be very hazardous: so far are they from revenging injuries, as to invite them; so far from being cruel, as to be tame; so far
from

from hating their enemies, as to cherish them; so far from persecuting, as not to fence and guard themselves against persecution; so far from using those offensive weapons of force and oppression, which the gospel forbids, as not to make use of those defensive arms of prudence and caution, which the soldiers of Christ are both allowed and required to be expert in.

When the wise man adviseth us "to search after wisdom, to put our feet into her fetters, and our neck into her chains;" he assures us, for our encouragement, that "her fetters shall be a strong defence for us, and her chains a robe of glory." We have seen some of the mischiefs which happen to virtuous men, through want of this defence; and it would not be difficult to shew what farther detriment accrues to virtue itself, from the want of this ornament. For when men, through a natural disposition to goodness are very honest, but, through a defect of good understanding, are not equally wise; this unguarded simplicity is too apt to betray them into some little weaknesses, which may cast a blemish both on them, and on those virtues which they practise, but in an unbecoming

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manner,

manner, and with an ill grace. And though good-nature and christian charity should over-look a few small faults in those, who are conspicuous for many eminent virtues; yet, in an ill-natured and uncharitable world, the want of discretion in good men may perhaps cast a greater blemish on religion, than the honour done it by their virtue and integrity will ever be able to wipe off. Let any one calmly consider, how contemptible a figure devotion makes, when it degenerates into superstition; how great mischief zeal hath done in the world, when it hath wanted the guidance of discretion; and how often conscientious persons have unwittingly been made the instruments of men of no conscience, to bring about their most wicked purposes; and he will be convinced of the necessity of "adding to our virtue knowledge," and of joining the "wisdom of the serpent to the innocence of the dove."

Many and great are the mischiefs, which have been observed to arise from the want of wisdom in those that are harmless: but still, these are few and inconsiderable, in comparison of those, which we proposed to consider in the

Second

Second place; namely, the mischiefs that arise from the want of innocence in those who are wise.

Wisdom is the gift of God; in itself useful, and by the author of it conferred on us for the noblest purposes; for the discovery of truth, and the detection of error; for the promoting our temporal and our eternal welfare; for procuring to ourselves and to others all the good things of which our natures are capable, and for averting from ourselves and others all the evils to which we are liable; for the establishment and preservation of kingdoms and states, by wholesome laws, wise counsels, and prudent administration. But this talent, which is by the author of our nature, and the giver of all good, bestowed upon men for such great and glorious ends, is capable of being perverted, and by persons destitute of that innocence, which ought to be the inseparable companion of wisdom, is often misused to the very worst of purposes. One of the ancients pronounces a curse against those who first found out the unlucky distinction between profitable and honest; and several, who had only the light of reason to guide them, have judged it extremely

scandalous, not only to prefer profit to honesty, but even so much as to bring the former into competition with the latter. But some persons, who call themselves christians, and some, who have appropriated to themselves the holy name of Jesus, have thought it a plain indication of weakness and folly to forego any thing which is greatly profitable, because it is a little dishonest; and have laughed at the idle scruples of those, who have given themselves the trouble to enquire, whether an action be lawful or not, after it hath once appeared expedient.

That it is unlawful for us to do evil that good may come; that we should be strictly careful, not only that the cause we are engaged in be just, but that the methods, whereby we promote it, be also warrantable; that we should chuse rather to suffer the greatest injury, than to do the least; that to deprive another of his just right, and to promote our own gain by our neighbour's loss, is a more intolerable evil than pain, or poverty, or even death; that we ought inviolably to do the thing which is right, and to speak the truth from our heart; that he who sweareth to his neighbour should not disappoint

appoint him, though it were to his own hurt; that the public welfare is always to be preferred to our private interest; and that every good man should be ready to sacrifice his ease, his fortune, his life, for the benefit of his country; are the principles of undepraved reason, and of our most holy religion. But these persons, in whom the wisdom of the serpent is so far predominant, as to leave no room for the innocence of the dove, finding that such maxims as these cramp them in the pursuit of their worldly aims, take care to shake off these cumbersome notions; and in their stead take up a set of principles, which, though they are not so well calculated for the good of society, are more convenient for private use. That the shortest ways to an end are fittest to be chosen, be they never so foul; that the appearance of virtue is an advantage, but the practice of it a burden; that charity ought to begin at home, and to end there too; are maxims, which, though owned by few, are by many made the measure of their actions.

Now what limits, what stop can be put to the hurt that may be done by persons, who have once strongly imbibed

these notions ; by persons, who have policy enough to contrive, cunning enough to dissemble, insinuation enough to persuade, dexterity enough to execute, any mischief ; and have no sense of common honesty to restrain them, no principles of sound religion to controul them ; or, which is worst of all, are by the prejudices of a false religion, encouraged and pushed on to perpetrate the greatest villanies ? The wisdom of such men must be the very reverse of “ that wisdom, which is from above ;” it is neither pure, nor peaceable ; neither gentle, nor easy to be entreated ; it is void of mercy, and of good fruits ; partial and hypocritical : in short, it is from below, from the old serpent ; and wherever it is found, “ there is confusion and every evil work.”

Let us in the next place take a view of the advantages, which result from our being at the same time both wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

Perfect wisdom, and perfect holiness are the incommunicable attributes of the Almighty ; and as far as men take care to excel in these divine qualities, so far do they approach towards the unattainable

tainable perfections of God himself. Hence it is, that the wise man, when he would give us a lofty and becoming idea of God, cloaths him with the same armour, which our Saviour hath here in the text provided for the good christian. "He shall put on righteousness," saith he, "as a breast-plate, and true judgment instead of an helmet. He shall take holiness for an invincible shield." The immaculate purity of God makes him utterly detest all manner of iniquity; the infinity of his wisdom places him out of the reach of any sort of calamity. Such a degree of unsullied holiness is too high for frail man, he cannot attain unto it; such a state of uninterrupted bliss is unsuitable to the condition of poor mortals; they must not hope, on this side the grave, to be possessed of it: but as far as human nature can go, so far will wisdom and innocence carry men. Integrity will make them strictly careful to do nothing which is sinful; and prudence will guard them against all mischiefs, that are fairly avoidable. Such is the steadiness of their virtue, such a strong hold hath religion upon their souls and consciences, that no prospect

of temporal advantage can allure them, no appearance of danger can deter them from their duty: and on the other side, such is the soundness of their judgment, that they will not lightly forego any interest, which they might preserve with a good conscience; or heedlessly run into any danger, which they might escape without forfeiting their integrity. Their honesty will not suffer them to do wrong, though an opportunity should offer itself of doing it with secrecy and impunity; and their prudence will secure them from being over-reached by the fraud of crafty and treacherous persons, "who lie in wait to deceive." They are too generous to impose upon others, and too cautious to be imposed upon: their sincerity never allows them, upon any occasion, to fly to the sordid arts of lying and dissimulation; and their discretion puts a bridle into their mouths, so as that they do not suffer those truths to escape their lips, which it is advisable to conceal.

The christian religion has taught them to "love their enemies, to do good to those which hate them, and to pray for those which despitefully use and persecute them:" but prudence directs them to be

be aware of their enemies; to be upon their guard against the malicious designs of those who hate them; and to use all honest and lawful means of securing themselves from despiteful usage and persecution. The goodness of their nature, and the charitableness of their christian temper, will not permit them to entertain evil surmises, vain suspicions, and groundless jealousies. They have not so bad an opinion of human nature, as to think all persons inclined to do them wrong, who are able to do it; to look upon themselves as unsafe, whilst it is in the power of their neighbours to hurt them; and to esteem it a necessary part of precaution to invade the rights of others, for fear that others may invade theirs. But, where they have been taught by long experience, that the power and inclination to do mischief go hand in hand together; where the sense of what they have already felt from an avowed enemy, leaves no room for charity to hope for a kinder treatment; where they find their adversaries grasping after an increase of power, with a manifest intention of employing it to their ruin; their wisdom awakens their vigilance, and sets them up-

on their guard, to do every thing which religion allows, and prudence prescribes for their own preservation.

The integrity of such men will not suffer them to do any thing, which their consciences tell them is sinful; and their discretion will instruct them, how to fence their innocent and laudable actions against the danger of being mistaken by the ignorant, or misrepresented by the malicious. A due sense of religion, and an awful fear of God, is the first and governing principle, which influences all their thoughts, and words, and actions, and makes them rigorously careful to do nothing, which may offend him, "who sees the inmost secrets of their hearts:" and when they have thus taken care to approve themselves in the sight of God, their wisdom doth farther direct them to place their virtues in such an advantageous light, as may best preserve them from the calumnies of their adversaries; so that "their good may not be evil spoken of."

Wisdom, though not necessary in the same degree with honesty; yet when joined with it, is of considerable use to give a due lustre to virtue, and to set it off
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to the best advantage. That good actions may not want the utmost beauty they are capable of, nor fail to gain the praise and admiration of all who observe them, those christians who are eminently wise as well as virtuous, do always take strict care, that their actions be not only, as to the substance and matter of them, agreeable to the laws of God, but moreover, that as to the very manner of their performance, they be so done as to appear graceful and amiable in the sight of men. In order to this, such good and wise persons are always careful to observe that decency which they who have best understood it, have been more able to exemplify by special instances, than to describe in general; which is the highest perfection of every art, and yet can be taught by none; which, wherever it is found, doth by a secret and irresistible force move our admiration, though we cannot distinctly assign what it is we so readily applaud; which pleaseth the nicest judges, and at the same time equally engages the unskilful; which in a word, all men agree to extol wherever it appears, but which only persons of great prudence, as well as unquestionable integrity are able

able to shew forth in all their actions. They have an accurate discernment of what is, upon every occasion, fit and agreeable: they know exactly how to make a judicious choice of that which is not only suitable to the laws of reason, as they are men, and to the holiness of their profession, as they are christians; but is also agreeable to their particular condition, and to that peculiar station which they are to adorn: they can adapt themselves aright to all circumstances, and fit every thing they do to its peculiar time and place: they are acquainted with the temper, sentiments, and interest of those with whom they are conversant; and foreseeing what is most likely to gain their good esteem, can take care so to demean themselves as may best procure it: they have carefully observed what it is which usually lessens the credit of good actions, and therefore are prepared to use all diligence to avoid such occasions of offence.

These are the persons who, by their excelling in wisdom as well as virtue, do honour to the religion which they profess: these are they who must retrieve its reputation in a loose and profligate age.

Great

Great blessings might a nation expect, great honour might redound to our holy religion, even from a few persons eminent for these qualifications; men of warm hearts and cool heads; zealous, but with discretion; honest, but not weak; wise, but not crafty; in short, strict observers of this divine precept of our blessed Lord, and genuine disciples of him, in whom “were hidden all the treasures of wisdom; who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.”

S E R M O N X.

Butler

ON THE LOVE OF GOD.

MATTHEW xxii. 37.

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all
thy heart, with all thy soul, and with
all thy mind.*

EVERY one knows, you therefore
need only just be put in mind, that
there is such a thing as having so great
horror of one extreme, as to run insen-
sibly and of course into the contrary; and
that a doctrine's having been a shelter
for

for enthusiasm, or made to serve the purposes of superstition, is no proof of the falsity of it: truth or right being somewhat real in itself, and so not to be judged of by its liableness to abuse, or by its supposed distance from or nearness to error. It may be sufficient to have mentioned this in general, without taking notice of the particular extravagances which have been vented under the pretence or endeavour of explaining the love of God; or how manifestly we are got into the contrary extreme, under the notion of a reasonable religion; so very reasonable as to have nothing to do with the heart and affections, if these words signify any thing but the faculty by which we discern speculative truth.

By the love of God, I would understand all those regards, all those affections of mind which are due immediately to him from such a creature as man, and which rest in him as their end. As this does not include servile fear; so neither will any other regards, how reasonable soever, which respect any thing out of or besides the perfection of the Divine Nature, come into consideration here. But all fear is not excluded, because his displeasure

displeasure is itself the natural proper object of fear. Reverence, ambition of his love and approbation, delight in the hope or consciousness of it, come likewise into this definition of the love of God; because he is the natural object of all those affections or movements of mind, as really as he is the object of the affection which is in the strictest sense called love; and all of them equally rest in him as their end. And they may all be understood to be implied in these words of our Saviour, without putting any force upon them: for he is speaking of the love of God and our neighbour, as containing the whole of piety and virtue.

It is plain that the nature of man is so constituted, as to feel certain affections upon the sight or contemplation of certain objects. Now the very notion of affection implies resting in its object as an end. And the particular affection to good characters, reverence and moral love of them, is natural to all those who have any degree of real goodness in themselves. This may be illustrated by the description of a perfect character in a creature; and by considering the manner in which a good man in his presence
would

would be affected towards such a character. He would of course feel the affections of love, reverence, desire of his approbation, delight in the hope or consciousness of it. And surely all this is applicable, and may be brought up to that Being, who is infinitely more than an adequate object of all those affections; whom we are commanded to "love with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind." And of these regards towards Almighty God, some are more particularly suitable to and becoming so imperfect a creature as man, in this mortal state, we are passing through; and some of them, and perhaps other exercises of the mind, will be the employment and happiness of good men in a state of perfection.

This is a general view of what this and the following discourse will contain. And it is manifest the subject is a real one: there is nothing in it enthusiastical or unreasonable. And if it be indeed at all a subject, it is one of the utmost importance.

As mankind have a faculty by which they discern speculative truth; so we have various affections towards external objects. Understanding and temper, rea-
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son and affection, are as distinct ideas as reason and hunger; and one would think could no more be confounded. It is by reason that we get the ideas of several objects of our affections: but in these cases, reason and affection are no more the same, than the sight of a particular object, and the pleasure and uneasiness consequent thereupon are the same. Now as reason tends to and rests in the discernment of truth, the object of it; so the very nature of affection consists in tending towards and resting in its object as an end. We do indeed often in common language say, that things are loved, desired, esteemed, not for themselves, but for somewhat further, somewhat out of and beyond them: yet in these cases, whoever will attend, will see that these are not in reality the objects of the affections, that is, are not loved, desired, esteemed for their own sakes, but for that which lies beyond them. If we have no affections which rest in what are called their objects, then what is called affection, love, desire, hope, in human nature, is only an uneasiness in being at rest; an unquiet disposition to action, progress, pursuit, without end or meaning. But if there
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be any such thing as delight in the company of one person, rather than of another; whether in the way of friendship, or mirth and entertainment, it is all one, if it be without respect to fortune, honour, or encreasing our stores of knowledge, or any thing beyond the present time; here is an instance of an affection absolutely resting in its object as its end, and being gratified, in the same way as the appetite of hunger is satisfied with food. Yet nothing is more common than to hear it asked, what advantage a man hath in such a course, suppose of study, particular friendships, or in any other; nothing, I say, is more common than to hear such a question put, in a way which supposes no gain, advantage or interest, but as a means to somewhat further: and if so, then there is no such thing at all as real interest, gain or advantage. This is the same absurdity with respect to life, as an infinite series of effects without a cause is in speculation. The gain, advantage or interest consists in the delight itself, arising from such a faculty's having its object: neither is there any such thing as happiness or enjoyment, but what arises from hence.

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The pleasures of hope and of reflection are not exceptions: the former being only this happiness anticipated; the latter, the same happiness enjoyed over again after its time. And even the general expectation of future happiness can afford satisfaction, only as it is a present object to the principle of self-love.

It was doubtless intended, that life should be very much a pursuit to the gross of mankind. But this is carried so much further than is reasonable, that what gives immediate satisfaction, that is, our present interest, is scarcely considered as our interest at all. They are inventions which have only a remote tendency towards enjoyment, perhaps but a remote tendency towards gaining the means only of enjoyment, which are chiefly spoken of as useful to the world. And though this way of thinking were just with respect to the imperfect state we are now in, where we know so little of satisfaction without satiety; yet it must be guarded against, when we are considering the happiness of a state of perfection; which happiness being enjoyment and not hope, must necessarily consist in this, that our affections have their objects as an end,
that

that is, be satisfied with them. This will further appear in the sequel of this discourse.

Of the several affections or inward sensations which particular objects excite in man, there are some, the having of which implies the love of them, when they are reflected upon. This cannot be said of all our affections, principles, and motives of action. It were ridiculous to assert that a man upon reflection hath the same kind of approbation of the appetite of hunger, or the passion of fear, as he hath of good will to his fellow-creatures. To be a just, a good, a righteous man, plainly carries with it a peculiar affection to, or love of justice, goodness, righteousness, when these principles are the objects of contemplation. Now if a man approves of, or hath an affection to any principle in and for itself; incidental things allowed for, it will be the same whether he views it in his own mind or in another; in himself, or in his neighbour. This is the account of our approbation of, our moral love and affection to good characters; which cannot but be in those who have any degrees of real goodness in themselves, and
who

who discern and take notice of the same principle in others.

From observation of what passes within ourselves, our own actions and the behaviour of others, the mind may carry on its reflections as far as it pleases; much beyond what we experience in ourselves, or discern in our fellow-creatures. It may go on, and consider goodness as become an uniform continued principle of action, as conducted by reason, and forming a temper and character absolutely good and perfect, which is in a higher sense excellent, and proportionably the object of love and approbation.

Let us then suppose a creature perfect according to his created nature: let his form be human, and his capacities no more than equal to those of the chief of men: goodness shall be his proper character; with wisdom to direct it, and power within some certain determined sphere of action to exert it: but goodness must be the simple actuating principle within him; this being the moral quality which is amiable, or the immediate object of love as distinct from other affections of approbation. Here then is a finite object for our minds to tend to-

wards, to exercise itself upon: a creature perfect according to his capacity, fixt, steady, equally unmoved by weak pity, or more weak fury and resentment; forming the justest scheme of conduct: going on undisturbed in the execution of it, through the several methods of severity and reward, toward his end, namely, the general happiness of all with whom he hath to do, as in itself right and valuable. This character, though uniform in itself, in its principle, yet exerting itself in different ways, or considered in different views, may by its apparent variety move different affections: thus, the severity of justice would not affect us in the same way, as an act of mercy: the adventitious qualities of wisdom and power may be considered in themselves: and even the strength of mind, which this immoveable goodness supposes, may likewise be viewed as an object of contemplation, distinct from the goodness itself. Superior excellence of any kind, as well as superior wisdom and power, is the object of awe and reverence to all creatures, whatever their moral character be: but so far as creatures of the lowest rank were good, so far the view of this character

as simply good, must appear amiable to them, be the object of, or beget love. Further, suppose we were conscious, that this superior person so far approved of us, that we had nothing servilely to fear from him; that he was really our friend, and kind and good to us in particular, as he had occasionally intercourse with us: we must be other creatures than we are, or we could not but feel the same kind of satisfaction and enjoyment (whatever would be the degree of it) from this higher acquaintance and friendship, as we feel from common ones; the intercourse being real, and the persons equally present, in both cases. We should have a more ardent desire to be approved by his better judgment, and a satisfaction in that approbation of the same sort with what would be felt in respect to common persons, or be wrought in us by their presence.

Let us now raise the character, and suppose this creature, for we are still going on with the supposition of a creature, our proper guardian and governour; that we were in a progress of being towards somewhat further; and that his scheme of government was too vast for our ca-

pacities to comprehend; remembering still that he is perfectly good, and our friend as well as our governour. Wisdom, power, goodness, accidentally viewed any where, would inspire reverence, awe, love: and as these affections would be raised in higher or lower degrees, in proportion as we had occasionally more or less intercourse with the creature endued with those qualities; so this further consideration and knowledge, that he was our proper guardian and governour, would much more bring these objects and qualities home to ourselves; and teach us that they had a respect to us in particular, that we had an interest in that wisdom and power and goodness. We should with joy, gratitude, reverence, love, trust, and dependence, appropriate the character, as what we had a right in; and make our boast in our relation to it. And the conclusion of the whole would be, that we should refer ourselves implicitly to him, and cast ourselves entirely upon him. As the whole attention of life should be to obey his commands; so the highest enjoyment of it must arise from the contemplation of this character, and our relation to it,
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from a consciousness of his favour and approbation, and from the exercise of those affections towards him, which could not but be raised from his presence. A being who hath these attributes, who stands in this relation, and is thus sensibly present to the mind, must necessarily be the object of these affections: there is as real a correspondence between them, as between the lowest appetite of sense and its object.

That this Being is not a creature, but the Almighty God; that he is of infinite power and wisdom and goodness, does not render him less the object of reverence and love, than he would be if he had those attributes only in a limited degree. The Being who made us, and on whom we entirely depend, is the object of some regards. He hath given us certain affections of mind, which correspond to wisdom, power, goodness; that is, which are raised upon view of those qualities. If then he be really wise, powerful, good; he is the natural object of those affections which he hath endued us with, and which correspond to those attributes. That he is infinite in power, and perfect in wisdom and goodness, makes

no alteration, except that he is the object of those affections raised to the highest pitch. He is not indeed to be discerned by any of our senses. "I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him. O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat." But is he then afar off: does he not fill heaven and earth with his presence? The presence of our fellow-creatures affects our senses, and our senses give us the knowledge of their presence; which hath different kinds of influence upon us; love, joy, sorrow, restraint, encouragement, reverence. However, this influence is not immediately from our senses, but from that knowledge. Thus suppose a person neither to see nor hear another, not to know by any of his senses, but yet certainly to know that another was with him; this knowledge might, and in many cases would, have one or more of the effects before mentioned. It is therefore not only reasonable, but also natural, to be affected with a presence,

a presence, though it be not the object of our senses: whether it be or be not, is merely an accidental circumstance, which needs not come into consideration: it is the certainty that he is with us, and we with him, which hath the influence. We consider persons then as present, not only when they are within reach of our senses, but also when we are assured by any other means that they are within such a nearness; nay, if they are not, we can recall them to our mind, and be moved towards them as present. And must he, who is so much more intimately with us, that “in him we live and move and have our being,” be thought too distant to be the object of our affections? We own and feel the force of amiable and worthy qualities in our fellow-creatures: and can we be insensible to the contemplation of perfect goodness? Do we reverence the shadows of greatness here below, are we solicitous about honour and esteem and the opinion of the world: and shall we not feel the same with respect to him, whose are wisdom and power in their original, “who is the God of judgment, by whom actions are weighed?” Thus love, reverence, desire of esteem, every faculty,

every affection, tends towards, and is employed about its respective object in common cases : and must the exercise of them be suspended with regard to him alone, who is an object, an infinitely more than adequate object, to our most exalted faculties ; him, “ of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things ? ”

As we cannot remove from this earth, or change our general business on it ; so neither can we alter our real nature. Therefore no exercise of the mind can be recommended, but the exercise of those faculties you are conscious of. Religion does not demand new affections ; it only claims the direction of those you already have, those affections you daily feel ; though unhappily confined to objects not altogether unsuitable, but altogether unequal to them. We only represent to you the higher, the adequate objects of those very faculties and affections. Let the man of ambition go on still to consider disgrace as the greatest evil ; honour, as his chief good. But disgrace, in whose estimation ? honour, in whose judgment ? This is the only question. If shame, and delight in esteem, be spoken of as real, as any settled

tled ground of pain or pleasure; both these must be in proportion to the supposed wisdom and worth of him by whom we are contemned or esteemed. Must it then be thought enthusiastical to speak of a sensibility of this sort, which shall have respect to an unerring judgment, to infinite wisdom; when we are assured, this unerring judgment, this infinite wisdom does observe our actions?

It is the same with respect to the love of God in the strictest and most confined sense. We only offer and represent the highest object of an affection supposed already in your mind. Some degree of goodness must be previously supposed: this always implies the love of itself, an affection to goodness: the highest, the adequate object of this affection is perfect goodness; which therefore we are to “love with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength.” “Must we then, forgetting our own interest, as it were go out of ourselves, “and love God for his own sake?” No more forget your own interest, no more go out of yourselves than when you prefer one place, one prospect, the conver-

sation of one man to that of another. Does not every affection necessarily imply, that the object of it be itself loved? If it be not, it is not the object of the affection. You may and ought if you can, but it is a great mistake to think you can love or fear or hate any thing, from consideration that such love or fear or hatred may be a means of obtaining good or avoiding evil. But the question, whether we ought to love God for his sake or for our own, being a mere mistake in language; the real question, which this is mistaken for, will I suppose be answered by observing that the goodness of God already exercised towards us, our present dependence upon him, and our expectation of future benefits, ought, and have a natural tendency to beget in us the affection of gratitude, and greater love towards him, than the same goodness exercised towards others: were it only for this reason, that every affection is moved in proportion to the sense we have of the object of it; and we cannot but have a more lively sense of goodness when exercised towards ourselves, than when exercised towards others.

Thus

Thus Almighty God is the natural object of the several affections, love, reverence, fear, desire of approbation. For though he is simply one, yet we cannot but consider him in partial and different views. He is in himself one uniform Being, and for ever the same without "variableness or shadow of turning:" but his infinite greatness, his goodness, his wisdom, are different objects to our minds. To which is to be added, that from the changes in our own characters, together with his unchangeableness, we cannot but consider ourselves as more or less the objects of his approbation, and really be so. For if he approves what is good; he cannot merely from the unchangeableness of his nature, approve what is evil. Hence must arise other movements of mind, and different kinds of affections. And this greater variety also is just and reasonable in such creatures as we are, though it respects a being simply one, good and perfect. As some of these affections are most particularly suitable to so imperfect a creature as man, in this mortal state we are passing through; so there may be other exercises of mind, or

some of these in higher degrees, our employment and happiness in a state of perfection.

But the farther illustration of this subject must be referred to another discourse,

SER.

S E R M O N XI.

ON THE LOVE OF GOD.

MATTHEW xxii. 37.

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all
thy heart, with all thy soul, and with
all thy mind.*

HAVING in the former discourse
considered the several affections
which are included in the general idea of
Love to God, let us now enquire what
religious affections are more particularly
suited to our present imperfect state, and
endeavour

endeavour to conceive in what manner the love of God may be supposed to operate in the life to come.

Though we are not affected with any thing so strongly, as what we discern with our senses; and though our nature and condition require, that we be much taken up about sensible things; yet our reason convinces us that God is present with us, and we see and feel the effects of his goodness: he is therefore the object of some regards. The imperfection of our virtue, joined with the consideration of his absolute rectitude or holiness, will scarcely permit that perfection of love which casts out all fear: yet goodness is the object of love to all creatures who have any degree of it themselves; and consciousness of a real endeavour to approve ourselves to him, joined with the consideration of his goodness, as it quite excludes servile dread and horror, so it is plainly a reasonable ground for hope of his favour. Neither fear, nor hope, nor love then are excluded: and one or another of these will prevail, according to the different views we have of God; and ought to prevail, according to the changes we find in our own character.

There

There is a temper of mind made up of, or which follows from all three, fear, hope, love, namely, resignation to the Divine Will, which is the general temper belonging to this state; which ought to be the habitual frame of our mind and heart, and to be exercised at proper seasons more distinctly, in acts of devotion.

Resignation to the will of God is the whole of piety: it includes in it all that is good, and is a source of the most settled quiet and composure of mind. There is the general principle of submission in our nature. Man is not so constituted as to desire things, and be uneasy in the want of them, in proportion to their known value: many other considerations come in to determine the degrees of desire; particularly, whether the advantage we take a view of, be within the sphere of our rank. Who ever felt uneasiness, upon observing any of the advantages brute creatures have over us? And yet it is plain they have several. It is the same with respect to advantages belonging to creatures of a superior order. Thus, though we see a thing to be highly valuable, yet that it does not belong

belong to our condition of being, is sufficient to suspend our desires after it, to make us rest satisfied without such advantage. Now there is just the same reason for quiet resignation in the want of every thing equally unattainable, and out of our reach in particular, though others of our species be possessed of it. All this may be applied to the whole of life; to positive inconveniences as well as wants; not indeed to the sensations of pain and sorrow, but to all the uneasiness of reflection, murmuring and discontent. Thus is human nature formed to compliance, yielding, submission of temper. We find the principles of it within us; and every one exercises it towards some objects or other; that is, feels it with regard to some persons, and some circumstances. Now this is an excellent foundation of a reasonable and religious resignation. Nature teaches and inclines us to take up with our lot: the consideration that the course of things is unalterable, hath a tendency to quiet the mind under it, to beget a submission of temper to it. But when we can add, that this unalterable course is appointed and continued by Infinite Wisdom and Good-

Goodness; how absolute should be our submission, how entire our trust and dependence!

This would reconcile us to our condition; prevent all the supernumerary troubles arising from imagination, distant fears, impatience; all uneasiness, except that which necessarily arises from the calamities themselves we may be under. How many of our cares should we by this means be disburdened of! Cares not properly our own, how apt soever they may be to intrude upon us, and we to admit them; the anxieties of expectation, solicitude about success and disappointment, which in truth are none of our concern. How open to every gratification would that mind be, which was clear of these incumbrances!

Our resignation to the will of God may be said to be perfect, when our will is lost and resolved into his; when we rest in his will as our end, as being itself most just, and right, and good. And where is the impossibility of such an affection to what is just, and right, and good, such a loyalty of heart to the Governor of the universe, as shall prevail over all sinister and indirect desires of
our

our own? Neither is this at bottom any thing more than faith, and honesty, and fairness of mind; in a more enlarged sense indeed, than those words are commonly used. And as, in common cases, fear and hope and other passions are raised in us by their respective objects: so this submission of heart and soul and mind, this religious resignation, would be as naturally produced by our having just conceptions of Almighty God, and a real sense of his presence with us. In how low a degree soever this temper usually prevails amongst men, yet it is a temper right in itself: it is what we owe to our creator: it is particularly suitable to our mortal condition, and what we should endeavour after for our own sakes in our passage through such a world as this; there is nothing upon which we can rest or depend; nothing but what we are liable to be deceived and disappointed in. Thus we might “acquaint ourselves with God and be at peace.” This is piety and religion in the strictest sense, considered as a habit of mind: an habitual sense of God’s presence with us; being affected towards him, as present in the manner his superior nature requires from
such

such a creature as man : this is to walk with God.

Little more need be said of devotion or religious worship, than that it is this temper exerted into act. The nature of it consists in the actual exercise of those affections towards God, which are supposed habitual in good men. He is always present with us : but we are so much taken up with sensible things, that, "Lo, he goeth by us, and we see him not : he passeth on also, but we perceive him not." Devotion is retirement from the world he has made, to him alone : it is to withdraw from the avocations of sense, to employ our attention wholly upon him as upon an object actually present, to yield ourselves up to the influence of the Divine Presence, and to give full scope to the affections of gratitude, love, reverence, trust and dependence ; of which Infinite Power, Wisdom and Goodness, is the natural and only adequate object. We may apply to the whole of devotion those words of the son of Sirach : "When you glorify the Lord, exalt him as you can ; for even yet will he far exceed : and when you exalt him, put forth all your strength,"
"and

“and be not weary; for you can never “go far enough.” Our most raised affections of every kind cannot but fall short and be disproportionate, when an Infinite Being is the object of them. This is the highest exercise and employment of mind that a creature is capable of. As this divine service and worship is itself absolutely due to God, so also is it necessary in order to a further end, to keep alive upon our minds a sense of his authority, a sense that in our ordinary behaviour amongst men we act under him as our Governor and Judge.

Thus you see the temper of mind respecting God, which is particularly suitable to a state of imperfection; to creatures in progression towards something further.

Suppose now this something further attained; that we were arrived at it: what a perception will it be, to see and know and feel that our trust was not vain, our dependence not groundless! That the issue, event, and consummation came out such as fully to justify and answer that resignation! If the obscure view of the Divine Perfection, which we have in this world, ought in just consequence to beget

beget an entire resignation; what will this resignation be exalted into, when “we shall see face to face, and know as we are known!” If we cannot form any distinct notion of that perfection of the love of God, which casts out all fear; of that enjoyment of him, which will be the happiness of good men hereafter; the consideration of our wants and capacities of happiness, and that he will be an adequate supply to them, must serve us instead of such distinct conception of the particular happiness itself.

Let us then suppose a man entirely disengaged from business and pleasure, sitting down alone and at leisure, to reflect upon himself and his condition of being. He would immediately feel that he was by no means compleat of himself, but totally insufficient for his own happiness. One may venture to affirm that every one hath felt this, whether he hath again reflected upon it or not. It is from feeling this deficiency that they are unsatisfied with themselves, and look out for assistance from abroad; it is this which has given rise to various kinds of amusements, altogether needless any otherwise than as they serve to fill up the
blank

blank spaces of time, and so hinder their feeling this deficiency, and being uneasy with themselves. Now if these external things we take up with, were really an adequate supply to this deficiency of human nature, if by their means our capacities and desires were all satisfied and filled up; then it might be truly said, that we had found out the proper happiness of man; and so might sit down satisfied, and be at rest in the enjoyment of it. But if it appears that the amusements which men usually pass their time in, are so far from coming up to, or answering our notions and desires of happiness or good, that they are really no more than what they are commonly called, somewhat to pass away the time; that is, somewhat which serves to turn us aside from, and prevent our attending to, this our internal poverty and want; if they tend only or chiefly to suspend, instead of satisfying our conceptions and desires of happiness; if the want remains, and we have found out little more than barely the means of making it less sensible; then are we still to seek for somewhat to be an adequate supply to it. It is plain that there is a capacity in the
nature

nature of man, which neither riches nor honours, nor sensual gratifications, nor any thing in this world can perfectly fill up, or satisfy: there is a deeper and more essential want than any of these things can supply. Yet surely there is a possibility of something, which may fill up all our capacities of happiness; something, which may be to us that satisfactory good we are enquiring after. But it cannot be any thing which is valuable only as it tends to some further end. Those therefore who have this world so much in their hearts, as not to be able to consider happiness as consisting in any thing but property and possessions, which are only valuable as the means to somewhat else, cannot have the least glimpse of the subject before us, which is the end, not the means; the thing itself, not something in order to it. But if you can lay aside that general, confused, indeterminate notion of happiness, as consisting in such possessions; and fix in your thoughts, that it really can consist in nothing but in a faculty's having its proper object: you will clearly see, that in the coolest way of consideration, without either the heat of fanciful enthusiasm

asm, or in the warmth of real devotion, nothing is more certain, than that an infinite Being may himself be, if he pleases, the supply to all the capacities of our nature. All the common enjoyments of life are from the faculties he hath endued us with, and the objects he hath made suitable to them. He may himself be to us infinitely more than all these: he may be to us all that we want. As our understanding can contemplate itself, and our affections be exercised upon themselves by reflection, so may each be employed in the same manner upon any other mind: and since the supreme Mind, the Author and cause of all things, is the highest possible object to himself, he may be an adequate supply to all the faculties of our souls; a subject to our understanding, and an object to our affections.

Consider then; when we shall have put off this mortal body, when we shall be divested of sensual appetites, and those possessions which are now the means of gratification shall be of no avail; when this restless scene of business and vain pleasures shall be all over; we, our proper self, shall still remain: we shall still

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continue the same creatures we are, with wants to be supplied, and capacities of happiness. We must have faculties of perception, though not sensitive ones; and pleasure or uneasiness from our perceptions, as now we have.

There are certain ideas, which we express by the words, order, harmony, proportion, beauty, the furthest removed from any thing sensual. Now what is there in those intellectual images, forms, or ideas, which begets that approbation, love, delight, and even rapture, which some persons discover upon having certain objects presented to their minds? "Mere enthusiasm!" Be it what it will: there are objects, works of nature and of art, which all mankind have delight from, quite distinct from those which afford gratification to sensual appetites; and from quite another view of them, than as being for their interest and farther advantage. The faculties from which we are capable of these pleasures, and the pleasures themselves are as natural, and as much to be accounted for, as any sensual appetite whatever, and the pleasure from its gratification. Words to be sure are wanting upon this subject: to say,

that every thing of grace and beauty throughout the whole of nature, every thing excellent and amiable shared in differently lower degrees by the whole creation, meet in the Author and cause of all things; this is an inadequate, and perhaps improper way of speaking of the Divine Nature: but it is manifest that absolute rectitude, the perfection of being, must be in all senses, and in every respect, the highest object to the mind.

In this world, they are only the effects of wisdom and power and greatness, which we discern: it is not impossible that hereafter the qualities themselves, in the Supreme Being, may be the immediate object of contemplation. What amazing wonders are opened to view by late improvements! what an object is the universe to a creature, if there be a creature who can comprehend its system! But it must be an infinitely higher exercise of the understanding, to view the scheme of it in that mind which projected it, before its foundations were laid. And surely we have meaning to the words, when we speak of going further; and viewing not only this system in his mind, but the wisdom and intelligence itself from whence
it

it proceeded. The same may be said of power. But since wisdom and power are not God, he is a wise, a powerful Being; the Divine Nature may therefore be a further object to the understanding. It is nothing to observe that our senses give us but an imperfect knowledge of things: effects themselves, if we knew them thoroughly, would give us but imperfect notions of wisdom and power; much less of the being in whom they reside. I am not speaking of any fanciful notion of seeing all things in God; but only representing to you, how much an higher object to the understanding an infinite Being himself is, than the things which he has made: and this is no more than saying, that the Creator is superior to the works of his hands.

This may be illustrated by a low example. Suppose a machine, the sight of which would raise, and discoveries in its contrivance gratify our curiosity: the real delight, in this case, would arise from its being the effect of skill and contrivance. This skill in the mind of the artificer would be a higher object, if we had any senses or ways to discern it. For certainly the contemplation of that principle,

ciple, faculty or power which produced any effect, must be an higher exercise of the understanding, than the contemplation of the effect itself. The cause must be a higher object to the mind than the effect.

But whoever considers distinctly what the delight of knowledge is, will see reason to be satisfied that it cannot be the chief good of man: all this, as it is applicable, so it was mentioned with regard to the attribute of goodness. Our being and all our enjoyments are the effects of divine goodness: just men bear its resemblance: but how little do we know of the original, of what it is in itself? Recall what was before observed concerning the affection to moral characters, which in how low a degree soever, yet is plainly natural to man, and the most excellent part of his nature: suppose this improved, as it may be improved to any degree whatever, in the "spirits of just men made perfect;" and then suppose that they had a real view of that "righteousness which is an everlasting righteousness;" of the conformity of the Divine Will to the law of truth, in which the moral attributes of God consist;

list; of that goodness in the sovereign mind, which gave birth to the universe: add, what will be true of all good men hereafter, a consciousness of having an interest in what they are contemplating; suppose them able to say, "This God is our God for ever and ever:" would they be any longer to seek for what was their chief happiness, their final good? Could the utmost stretch of their capacities look further? Would not infinitely perfect goodness be their very end, the last end and object of their affections; beyond which they could neither have, nor desire; beyond which they could not form a wish or thought.

Consider wherein that presence of a friend consists, which has often so strong an effect, as wholly to possess the mind, and entirely suspend all other affections and regards; and which itself affords the highest satisfaction and enjoyment. He is within reach of the senses. Now as our capacities of perception improve, we shall have perhaps, by some faculty entirely new, a perception of God's presence with us in a nearer and stricter way; since it is certain he is more intimately present with us, than any thing else can

be. Proof of the existence and presence of any being is quite different from the immediate perception, the consciousness of it. What then will be the joy of heart, which his presence and "the light of his countenance," who is the life of the universe, will inspire good men with, when they shall have a sensation, that he is the sustainer of their being, that they exist in him; when they shall feel his influence to cheer and enliven and support their frame, in a manner of which we have now no conception? He will be in a literal sense "their strength and their portion for ever."

When we speak of things so much above our comprehension, as the employment and happiness of a future state, doubtless it behoves us to speak with all modesty and distrust of ourselves. But the scripture represents the happiness of that state under the notions of "seeing God, seeing him as he is, knowing as "we are known, and seeing face to face." These words are not general or undetermined, but express a particular determinate happiness. And I will be bold to say, that nothing can account for, or come up to these expressions, but only this,

this, that God himself will be an object to our faculties, he himself will be our happiness; as distinguished from the enjoyments of the present state, which seem to arise, not immediately from him, but from the objects he has adapted to give us delight.

To conclude: Let us suppose a person tired with care and sorrow and the repetition of vain delights which fill up the round of life; sensible that every thing here below in its best estate is altogether vanity. Suppose him to feel that deficiency of human nature, before taken notice of; and to be convinced that God alone was the adequate supply to it. What could be more applicable to a good man, in this state of mind; or better express his present wants and distant hopes, his passage through this world as a progress towards a state of perfection, than the following passages in the devotions of the royal psalmist? They are plainly in a higher and more proper sense applicable to this, than they could be to any thing else. "I have seen an end of all
 " perfection. Whom have I in heaven
 " but thee? and there is none upon
 " earth that I desire in comparison of
 L 4 " thee.

“ thee. My flesh and my heart faileth:
“ but God is the strength of my heart,
“ and my portion for ever. Like as the
“ hart desireth the water brooks; so
“ longeth my soul after thee, O God.
“ My soul is athirst for God, yea, even
“ for the living God: when shall I come
“ to appear before him? How excel-
“ lent is thy loving-kindness, O God!
“ and the children of men shall put their
“ trust under the shadow of thy wings.
“ They shall be satisfied with the plen-
“ teousness of thy house: and thou shalt
“ give them drink of thy pleasures, as
“ out of a river. For with thee is the
“ fountain of life: and in thy light shall we
“ see light. Blessed is the man whom
“ thou chusest, and receivest unto thee:
“ he shall dwell in thy court, and shall
“ be satisfied with the pleasures of thy
“ house, even of thy holy temple. Bles-
“ sed is the people, O Lord, that can re-
“ joice in thee: they shall walk in the
“ light of thy countenance. Their de-
“ light shall be daily in thy name, and
“ in thy righteousness shall they make
“ their boast. For thou art the glory
“ of their strength: and in thy loving-
“ kindness they shall be exalted. As for
“ me,

“ me, I will behold thy presence in right-
“ eousness: I shall be satisfied when I a-
“ wake in thy likeness. Thou shalt shew
“ me the path of life; in thy presence is
“ fulness of joy, and at thy right hand are
“ pleasures for evermore.

"me, I will behold the presence in light;
"and I shall be filled with it."
"There is the likeness. Thou shalt have
"the path of life; in the presence
"of God, and at thy right hand are
"glories for evermore."

S E R M O N XII.

A GOOD LIFE THE BEST ORNAMENT
OF THE CHRISTIAN PROFESSION.

TITUS ii. 10.

*That they may adorn the doctrine of God
our Saviour in all things.*

THOUGH the apostles of Christ applied themselves to the conversion of mankind, principally by such arguments as proved the reasonableness and
L 6 credibility

credibility of their doctrine; though they asserted the authority of their mission, and that they were preachers sent from God, by those demonstrations of the spirit, the miraculous effects of Divine Power which attended their ministry; though they might challenge the greatest enemies of the gospel to object any thing to the morality of its precepts; yet still they appeared farther solicitous to enforce these arguments by, that great recommendation to the esteem of the world, a correspondent purity in the lives of its disciples. This was a part of their ministry, in which they required their proselytes to concur with them: and particularly the apostle in the text commands Titus not only to be a pattern of good works himself, but to exhort every rank and order of men, the young and the old, the husband and the wife, the master and the servant, to be exemplary in the duties of their several stations, and in every part of their conduct to adorn the doctrine they professed. By this expression of “adorning the doctrine of our Saviour,” it is obvious to understand advancing the credit and esteem of it in the world; behaving ourselves in such a manner, that the beauty
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of that holiness it prescribes may appear in our lives ; and even the enemies of our religion may be forced to acknowledge the power and excellence of so venerable an institution.

I shall endeavour to recommend this apostolical precept to your attention, by shewing, that it is the duty of every christian to be concerned for the reputation or discredit which his life may bring on his profession ; after which I shall consider what conduct will acquit us of this obligation.

First ; It is the duty of every christian to be concerned for the reputation or discredit which his life may bring on his profession. For though this epistle be particularly directed to Titus, and in him to the bishops and pastors of the flock of Christ ; yet this consideration is here rather suggested to him as a proper argument to engage the obedience of those under his care, than a special direction to himself. The apostle had employed the former part of this chapter in prescribing the duties which it would be proper for him to recommend to every condition and relation of life ; and then subjoins this, as an universal reason for
their

their compliance, that they might “adorn the doctrine of their Saviour.” He had before exhorted Titus himself to be “an example of good works;” and he is here commanded to press the same regularity on his whole charge, from this consideration, that the honour of their religion depended on it. The ministers of the gospel are indeed especially required to “shine as lights in the world,” because the distinction of their station renders their conduct more observable, and the presumption of their knowledge, and the dignity of their office gives a peculiar force and authority to their example: but the light of inferior christians is also to be visible: and as no circumstances of life can place a man so far below the notice of the world, but that his virtues or vices will render him, in some degree, an ornament or disgrace to his profession; so none are below the obligation of this precept to promote the credit of it.

Shall we all think ourselves bound to consult the reputation of our friend, or our family, and of the laws and constitutions of our country; and shall the honour of that God whom we serve, and the religion by which we hope

to

to be saved, have no share in our concern? Can we with indifference hear the word of God, and the sacred name of our Saviour blasphemed, and at the same time reflect that the scandal of our lives gives the occasion for it? For, after all we can say to disparage the argument, men do, and will judge of religion by the influence it has on the lives of its disciples, and be inclined to think contemptibly of that faith which has no apparent moral effect on the professors of it. Not all the subtle objections of sophisters and Rabbies against the truth and credibility of the gospel, so much prejudiced the reception of it in the world, as the reproach of those infamous crimes with which they aspersed the assemblies of christians. And therefore the apologists of the church, in their vindications, appeal not so much to the purity of the rules and precepts of their religion, as to the innocence of their lives; and defy the malice of their adversaries to produce one impure, unjust, or intemperate person among all who were called by the name of Christ. Thus was the gospel adorned in the innocence and simplicity of its infancy; and thus were they of the contrary part made ashamed,
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“having no evil thing to say of them.” And christianity will always demand the same tribute from its disciples. It is implied in every one of its commands, that we should not only obey them ourselves, but use our best endeavours to recommend the same obedience to others also. And since an exemplary deportment in the duties of our station, is the most probable method to produce this effect; to reclaim the dissolute, convert the infidel, and win the greatest enemies of our faith to a respect and veneration for it; this is an obligation which will never cease, but remain a necessary duty in all ages and circumstances of the church.

Let us then proceed to consider what particular conduct will acquit us of this obligation. In general there is something lovely and endearing in every single instance of duty prescribed by the gospel: a beauty, which the most dissolute are forced to acknowledge, and the libertine himself to applaud and admire. How irresistible then are the charms of virtue, when the obedience is universal? when the graces of religion shine with a united lustre, and no crime can be objected to darken the character,
and

and fully the perfection of the example? But I shall content myself at present with recommending the practice of some particular duties, of a more especial tendency to procure respect to ourselves, and honour to our religion; and those are,

First; An extensive love and charity, the bond of peace, and foundation of all the comforts of a social life. It is this most christian grace of our religion which softens our passions, appeases our resentments, and extends our beneficence to the miseries of our brethren; which inclines us to "support the needy, compassionate the fatherless, and relieve the tears of the widow;" which renders us the blessings and ornaments of the age in which we live, and the veneration of those which come after. And so lovely and obliging a disposition of soul cannot fail of endearing both us and our religion to the gratitude and affections of men. Let the fierce and implacable spirit of revenge be the character of our enemies; let them slander and traduce the innocent, let them oppress and persecute the poor and the helpless; but let it be our glory to be pure and peaceable, ready to forgive, and easy to be intreated; compassionate
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to the sorrows, and bountiful to the wants of our greatest enemies. By this we shall vindicate the honour of our religion; by this shall all men know that we are the disciples of Christ.

A second virtue which I would recommend as of peculiar efficacy to incline men to venerable thoughts of our religion, is firmness and resolution. A behaviour, which even in the moral accounts of virtue has always commanded the highest respect from men. And as no institution of life has ever furnished its disciples with such powerful and generous motives of courage as the christian, so nothing can reflect so much honour upon our religion, as on all occasions to act up to the spirit and principles of it. Let a man's pretences to religion be ever so great, let his conduct in other respects be ever so regular, yet if he faint in the day of trial, if we see him shrink from an unacceptable duty, betray the cause of God, and prevaricate with the most avowed principles of his conscience; is it not natural to suspect that there is an evil heart of unbelief, a secret reserve of infidelity at the bottom? especially if he be a man of any eminence for his knowledge

ledge or station; one who is presumed to have formed his principles upon calm and deliberate enquiries, and to be a master of all the arguments that can plead for religion: when such a one shall fall away, and act contrary to his most professed convictions, with what shame and confusion must all good men behold the example? What scandal must it give to the weak, and what triumph to the infidel? With what confidence will he conclude, that either our religion wants arguments to convince a reasonable enquirer, or encouragements to support its converts in perseverance. On the contrary, when we see even the meanest christian stand firm in his duty, and hold fast the integrity of his profession; when we see him renounce his interest, his pleasure, and even life itself in obedience to the commands of his religion; the most indifferent spectator must applaud the courage, the honesty, and sincerity of the man; and confess the power of that institution, which can infuse so much bravery and spirit into the souls of its disciples. It was the zeal and resolution of the first christians; it was the patience of confessors, and the courage of the noble

noble army of its martyrs, that procured respect and honour to the gospel; and prevailed more in the conversion of the world, than either the arguments, the oratory, or even the miracles of its preachers.

A third duty, which will be always necessary to secure the credit of our religion, is a due obedience to the authority of our superiors. It was an early objection, and too successfully urged by the adversaries of christianity, that it was an enemy to civil government: that it pretended to exempt the servant from obedience to his master, and the subject from his prince. And as nothing could raise a greater prejudice against any religion, than an imputation of inconsistency with the laws and subordinations of government, so there is no reproach which Christ and his apostles are more careful to obviate than this. Thus we find our Lord on all occasions disclaiming all pretensions to a temporal kingdom; commanding his disciples to render to Cæsar the obedience that was due to him: and though in strictness he tells us he might have pleaded an exemption from the Jewish tribute required of him, yet rather than
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countenance the aspersions that would attend his refusal, he exerted his divine power in a miracle to pay it. And as the same calumny pursued his apostles, so we find them equally solicitous to clear themselves and their religion from the scandal of it: inculcating the doctrine of subjection for conscience sake; and, in their own persons, submitting to the most unjust and tyrannical inflictions from the heathen tribunals. And though it was some ages before the jealousies of the civil powers were thoroughly reconciled to the assemblies of christians, yet we find them at length so perfectly acquitted from this slander, that even Julian himself, the most implacable enemy that ever appeared against the gospel, reproaches his heathen subjects with the fidelity of the christians. This was the ancient, and is, I hope, yet the unforfeited glory of our religion. The malice of its adversaries has in all ages laboured to deprive it of this honour, and to expose it to the resentments of the magistrate as an encourager of sedition. But “wisdom will still be justified of her children.” That pure and peaceable wisdom, which always was and always will be the character of the church of

of Christ, will in the end refute the aspersions of its enemies: and the meek, the humble, the patient servant of Christ will be found the truest friend to Cæsar.

Lastly; Let us crown these virtues with a prudent, affable, and courteous behaviour towards all men. It is indeed the inward purity and sincerity of the heart, that principally recommends us to the searcher of spirits: but since God has also enjoined it upon us as a duty to render his service amiable to others, these external decencies and ornaments of our conduct, become a very important part of morality. It is in these the efficacy of our example will chiefly consist. The great and more observable occasions of exercising our courage, our justice, or our charity, occur but seldom: but these are of daily and constant use, to preserve a general benevolence, and endear our common intercourse between one another. Without this care our best actions will lose much of their influence, and our severer virtues be often discredited with the appearance of evil. But how bright and lovely does every grace of our religion shine, when adorned with a humble and oblig-

obliging behaviour? Beautiful as a jewel set in gold; which, though it adds little to the intrinsic value, yet improves the lustre, and attracts the eyes and affections of the beholder. And therefore the apostles of Christ have not failed to make it a constant part of their instructions to their converts to avoid all unseemliness and asperity of carriage; to do nothing that may argue a peevish or forward spirit; not rendring railing for railing; on the contrary, to be gentle and condescending: "if any man asks us to go with him a mile, to go with him twain: to be modest and unsparing, in honour preferring one another; to be tender and compassionate, to weep with them that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice." In general, to be studious of the peace and interests of our neighbour, and endeavour, by an affectionate deportment, to leave impressions of esteem and benevolence on all we converse with: "Whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, any praise, to think of these things." Our duty only must be too valuable

valuable an interest to be given up in a compliment, or sacrificed to the applause of men. If indeed we thus please men, and can be persuaded to any criminal compliances to avoid their resentments, or engage their favour, we cannot also be the servants of Christ. But if passionate and unreasonable men will, notwithstanding our best care, be offended with us for doing our duty, God and all good men will applaud our integrity, and shame and contempt will be the portion of our enemies.

Let me then in conclusion of this discourse, exhort you seriously to reflect on the great engagements we are under to assert the honour of that religion we profess, by an exemplary practice of the duties I have recommended. Let us strive to vindicate the honour of our religion, by a pure and unspotted obedience to the rules and precepts it enjoins: this will more effectually secure the interests, and promote the credit of it, than either the eloquence of our preachers, or the authority of our laws. And, blessed be God, the righteous are not so failed from the earth, but we can still appeal to bright and numerous examples of virtue

tue among us. The number and devotion of those who frequent our altars, and the many great and excellent works of piety and charity promoted among us, are a burning and shining light, such an evidence of the eternal power of our religion on the minds of its disciples, as must command reverence from all who behold it, and ought to be allowed in balance against the evil examples, of those with whose crimes our adversaries are so ready to reproach us. But let us not content ourselves with being better than our enemies represent us; let us go on unto perfection, and improve in every grace of our religion. Let us add to our faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge patience, temperance, and charity. Let us by a meek and quiet behaviour cut off all occasion from those who seek occasion, that they may have whereof to accuse us. And though we have all encouragement to hope that the evil day of persecution is far from us, yet let us always live in such a preparation of mind, that if God shall at any time call us to a trial of our faith, we may acquit ourselves with a courage becoming the hope and spirit of christians. In fine; let the

beauty of our religion appear in the holiness of our lives. Let our virtue shine forth as the light, and our just dealing as the noon day; then shall "our light" so shine before men, that they seeing "our good works, may glorify our Father which is in heaven."

S E R M O N XIII.

THE MORAL INFIRMITY OF HUMAN
NATURE CONSIDERED.

MATTHEW XXV. 5.

While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.

THE state of things under the gospel, is set forth to us by a variety of representations; each of which inculcates on us, in a very lively manner, the duties we are to discharge, and the encourage-

agements we have to obedience. But beyond this in the parable before us, we are likewise instructed how men will behave in fact; either by pursuing the great purposes intended by our religion, or else by neglecting them. Thus we see, "the kingdom of heaven is likened unto ten virgins; and five of them were wise, and five were foolish." Their different conduct clearly justifies the several characters assigned them; for though they set out all of them alike, on the very same design, yet the one sort only regarded the means conducive to it, whilst the other contented themselves with having chosen the end, without bestowing so much as one thought on the right measures for attaining it.

But what I am to remark at present as a point proper to be considered by us, relates to the conduct of the wise themselves; who though they answered, in a good measure, the purposes of Providence, as well in the choice of means as ends, are yet accused of certain degrees of negligence; of not acting a constant and uniform part, and persecuting these means with uninterrupted vigour. Thus it is charged as well on the wise as on the foolish,

lish, that “while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.”

However, it should be observed, that whilst this conduct is distinctly noticed, our blessed Lord hath shewn exceeding tenderness towards it: he hath just remarked the thing itself, without making any severe reflections upon it; and by the conclusion of the parable, he insinuates clearly, that the matter was rather owing to infirmity than disobedience. This was the interpretation he was pleased to make of his disciples behaviour on another like occasion; “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”.

And in truth, on any other footing than this, the virgins here described, could not support the general character given them. Had their negligence been gross and inexcusable, or owing to any settled principles of vice, their lamps likewise must have gone out, and the bridegroom have found them unprepared. But as the contrary appears, the conclusion which offers itself is plainly this, that the very best and wisest of men are subject to infirmities; which though they detract from the perfection of their services, yet will not destroy the reward of them.

This doctrine concerning the moral infirmity of human nature, I shall illustrate and confirm: and then represent those points of instruction, which the consideration of this doctrine suggests to us.

This point in the general is matter of experience; what the greatest men have ever acknowledged, and we ourselves are conscious of, whenever we examine our own conduct. No human character is entirely perfect. The greatest moral accomplishments have some unhappy qualities mixed with them, which draw men out of the straight road of duty; and though by extraordinary care, they should escape the grosser acts of vice, yet there are faults enough to be found in their conduct of a lesser size. Nay, supposing more than can reasonably be imagined in this frail state of things; supposing a man so far virtuous as to keep free from the direct breach of any of God's laws, yet our best actions are in certain degrees imperfect: they fall short of their proper rule; and cannot bear the strict survey of infinite purity.

Thus much is certain in the general; yet to make a stronger impression on our minds, I shall consider the point more distinctly;

distinctly ; and shall shew in what particulars this moral infirmity betrays itself, and from what principles it may be thought to arise.

Here then it will be proper to observe, in the first place, that notwithstanding what may be advanced of human reason, there is some ignorance to be found in all men, and much in far the greater number. This in some cases, is voluntary ; in others, unavoidable : but whichever it be the effect on their behaviour will be much the same. The proper rules of life are not always understood. The very wisest sometimes err ; mistaking either as to the general precept, or the particular application of it. This was more remarkably visible whilst human reason was their only guide : their best formed schemes of morality were defective in some points, and erroneous in others ; and therefore “ while the very light within them was darkness, how great was that darkness ! ” Now indeed we are relieved in great measure, by a kind and merciful Providence. The Divine Will is laid open to us by express revelation ; and we are in a high sense of the expression, taught by God. But what if there

still remains some incapacity, or indisposition at least, in the learner? What if want of apprehension, or the occasions of life, or laziness and indolence shall set some below others in spiritual improvements? The consequence must be plainly this; their conduct will be as irregular as their understandings are defective.

This however, is the least source of moral infirmity. The more general rules of religion and morality can scarce be mistaken; at least without some very faulty negligence. Yet it is one thing to know the rule itself, and another to apprehend the several motives sufficient to enforce it. The understanding, by itself, can serve only to shew the way, and direct men what to do; but as the immediate principle of action is of another kind, so it requires something farther to influence it. This principle is entirely governed by the motives of action; which being of various kinds, will require no small compass of mind to apprehend them. Some of these are drawn from the harmony of things, and the beauty of actions; some from a sense of gratitude; some from the expectations of divine favour; some from the advantages of this
present

present life; and some from the consideration of future reward or punishment. All these assist each other, and supply the defects which each might have in a separate consideration. But what man hath a comprehensive view of all these motives? Many have but a low taste of moral beauty; a slight sense of gratitude; are thoughtless about the favour or displeasure of God; are rather governed by a present view of things, than the remote consequences they may produce; and, as to future rewards or punishments (what weight soever they ought to have) they are at a great distance; and too apt to be disregarded: and where some of these are understood and attended to (as no doubt they often are) the sense of them however is imperfect; at least they are weak, whilst unassisted by those others, which might enforce them, and give them a stronger influence on the mind.

Besides what hath been advanced hitherto, it is farther to be remarked, that means are necessary to forward virtue, as well as motives to enforce it: for, as difficulties will occur, these must, some way or other, be removed or counteracted. Hence it comes to pass,
M 5 that

that besides the knowledge of what is proper, and of the several reasons of action, temptations must carefully be avoided: in some cases, one passion must be encouraged to balance another; the whole system of the mind must be examined; the secret dependencies of one thing on another noted; and the several inward movements adjusted. All this is necessary in order to carry on a uniform course of virtue. But what man is sufficient for all these things? Who is there so thoroughly acquainted with himself, as to know perfectly all the secret and remote principles of his actions? And yet, where men fail in this, their conduct will be more or less uncertain; and though regular in the main, yet subject to many occasional deviations.

Thus far I have endeavoured to account for the moral infirmity of human nature, from the consideration of ignorance. I shall proceed a step farther, and observe, that however perfect our knowledge might be supposed, there is yet another misfortune attending us, which must frequently prevent the effects of this knowledge; I mean, a want of attention to those matters which we know.

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It is certain that no rules can direct our conduct, unless they are immediately present to the mind; nor can we be influenced by any motives which are not attentively considered by us. The habitual sense of these things (which may be called the knowledge of them) will therefore be of little avail, unless we are constantly looking about us, and ready to bring this knowledge forth upon every emergent occasion. But do the generality of christians keep these matters perpetually in view? Are they always prepared when the opportunities of action present themselves? On the contrary, every man is more or less inadvertent; apt to start aside from the very rules he approves, and to act without regard to the general and settled principles of his actions. This is the known state of things; and will of itself account for the behaviour of the virgins referred to in the gospel; who, notwithstanding they set out on the noblest design, yet "whilst the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept."

Add to this another source of moral infirmity, which is, a want of courage and resolution; a virtue highly necessary,

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since

since temptations are so apt to assault us, and so many hardships must be encountered by us. Of this defect, instances sufficient may be met with; and the scriptures themselves supply us with them in characters, on other accounts, eminently virtuous. What but this induced St. Peter to deny his Lord, and the other apostles to forsake him? They were overcome by a present sense of danger, which would not suffer them to collect their thoughts, and to act bravely. But the main thing I am to observe here, is of another kind; relating not so much to the dangers we may be exposed to, as the opposition we may meet with. This likewise requires some strength and vigour of mind, more than the generality, upon all occasions, are masters of. Some men can scarce prevail with themselves to resolve at all; or, if they do, how weak and feeble are their resolutions! Others can master lesser difficulties, and go through with credit; but when assaulted by stronger temptations, they are lost: their courage then fails them, when it most concerns them to be resolute.

And, after all, whatever strength of mind they may have, yet as the assaults
upon

upon their virtue are perpetual, as they are no moment disengaged from their duty, or the difficulties that attend it, it is not to be expected but that they will sometimes fail. This is one great reason why no human character can be entirely perfect: it will always require certain grains of allowance; and must be judged of rather by its great and principal strokes, than by the lesser beauties which might serve to finish it.

These observations may suffice to evince the moral weakness of human nature, and to show that even the best of men are in danger of falling into a conduct resembling that of the "wise virgins," who while the bridegroom tarried, slumbered and slept."

I now proceed to the several points of instruction which the consideration of the foregoing doctrine suggests to us. These principally concern our conduct, either in reference to other men or to ourselves.

The first point we should learn, is this; not to be severe in censuring the conduct of other men. It becomes us to be cautious in this respect, because not knowing the whole state of things, we cannot always affirm for certain what is really good or bad; and because in many cases,

ses, a thing wrong in itself, may on account of the circumstances attending it, be entirely innocent in the doer. But these cases do not belong to the present consideration. I am here to suppose the thing ill, and the actor culpable: yet still it should be remembered that we know too little of the inward state and disposition of the man, to determine precisely in what degree he is to be censured or excused. Different men labour under different degrees of moral infirmity; and therefore in that view of the matter, the very same actions will be differently estimated by the all-wise judge of things. It is plain we may err in our judgment of these matters; and therefore we should be reserved and cautious: or if it could be supposed that the whole of things were open to us; that we knew how far human infirmity might go; and, by reflecting on our own weaknesses, were thoroughly apprised of other men's: even in this case it would become us to be as tender of others, as we are of ourselves; and to compassionate their errors as readily as we excuse our own. This is the least which ought to be concluded from the sense of our own moral infirmity.

We

We should learn, in the next place, by no actions of ours to lay temptations in the way of other men. We have considered, in some measure, the moral infirmity of human nature. As this is a matter of the highest concern, and what every serious person must lament, it becomes us surely not to make too dangerous experiments upon it. To do this is like the setting fire to combustible matter; in which case, though the persons more immediately concerned may be the first and principal sufferers, yet equal judges will lay no small share of blame on us: we shall become "partakers in other mens" sins, when we command them by authority; encourage them by our countenance; or lead to them by our example.

To advance a step farther: the doctrine considered is a strong motive to engage us to use our best endeavours, to preserve men in their innocence, or to reclaim them from their sins. Our condition, in the best view we can take of it, is dangerous enough: the assaults made on our virtue are vigorous; and our powers of resisting them, are, God knows, feeble. All assistances therefore are necessary; and as men may be mutually serviceable to
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one another in this great affair, so it concerns them to embrace every opportunity of being so. See the direction which our apostle gives us in reference to this point; "exhort one another daily, whilst it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." There are two considerations to the present purpose of singular moment: the one, that our endeavouring to secure the virtue and innocence of our brethren, is doing the greatest honour to religion; the other, that it promotes the highest interest and happiness of men. It is the best evidence we can possibly give of our own inward piety and benevolence; and if we are not affected by this consideration, I must confess, I know none others more likely to work on a serious and generous mind.

Besides what hath been already observed, there are other matters of instruction in reference to ourselves, which the doctrine before insisted on suggests to us.

We should learn from hence to be modest and humble; not to depend too much on our own abilities, nor to value ourselves too highly on our own performances. We have seen already the infirm

firm condition of human nature ; how little we are capable of doing by our own mere strength ; and consequently, how much we ought to distrust ourselves. In some matters we are ignorant ; if our duty lies open to us, yet the motives to discharge it are out of view ; or, if these appear in full force, yet possibly we may not be so well acquainted with the several means which facilitate duty by preparing the way to it ; or, if all these things are known, yet it may happen, that we are heedless and inattentive, unapt to reflect, and to bring forth our habitual knowledge upon emergent occasions : and after all, how fortunate soever we may prove as to the foregoing particulars, we frequently want that vigour of mind, and firmness of resolution which is necessary to carry us through with honour. The result is plainly this ; we should live in a constant dependence on the all-good Being, and implore his assistance in proportion to our want of it.

There is one thing farther to be observed here ; namely, when we perform any thing well, we ought not to claim the honour of it to ourselves, but ascribe it (where it is most justly due) to that merciful

ciful Being who assisted us in performing it. This follows directly from what was just before observed: for if we labour under such moral imperfections as makes the Divine Assistance necessary, then the success we meet with in our spiritual affairs, must be owing not so much to ourselves as God: and if to act without a dependence on the supreme Being is justly to be esteemed rashness, to value ourselves too highly on the excellency of our performances is insolence.

We may remark farther, that as the imperfection of our present state is an argument for our humility, so is it likewise a proper consideration to enforce on us a double watchfulness and diligence. Were our condition such as rendered us secure against all assaults, something might be said in excuse for our negligence; or rather, on such a supposition, all the care we might take were needless. But since we are surrounded by numberless temptations, and yet so weakly fortified within, we must make up by diligence what is wanting in strength, and keep the enemy at as great a distance as possible. The christian course is resembled to a warfare, in which
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art supplies the room of force, and the conquest depends as much on the activity as the strength of the warrior. It becomes us therefore to take the measures of our conduct from hence; and to pursue the great affairs of eternity with the same prudent zeal as others do a temporal conquest, and a fading crown of glory.

I would observe in the last place, the great expediency of self-denial. Our moral imperfection, we have seen, is founded in the force of temptations, the strength of our appetites, and our weakness in resisting them. All methods therefore must be exceedingly proper, which may serve either to keep temptations at a distance, or to abate the force of our inward desires, or to improve our moral powers. Now the expedient proposed is of the highest moment in the present case, as it serves all these ends alike, and is not confined to any one particular, exclusive of the rest. Thus, as to the former: whilst the method proposed implies not only our keeping within the bounds of duty, but our retiring at as great distance as possible from sin, contradicting our very desires,
and

and abstaining from things even in themselves innocent; if it does not entirely destroy temptations, it keeps us out of the way of them: and, without question, in all cases where the victory may be doubtful, we are concerned as much as possible to decline the combat.

Nor is this all: supposing we should notwithstanding be assaulted (and this we can hardly avoid, on all occasions, whilst surrounded by so many engaging objects) yet the temptations themselves will have less influence on us, whilst our desires are kept under rule. We should consider self-denial as a course of discipline; not intended to grieve and afflict us, but to train us up to virtue; to keep our appetites and passions low; and to give reason the more absolute command over them. A little experience will convince us of what importance the exercise of self-denial is to render us in a proper degree indifferent to those objects of sense, which are apt to have the greatest influence upon us.

This exercise will likewise conduce to improve our moral powers: it will give room for the advancement of our reason; it will enlarge our knowledge,
both

both of duty and motives ; and render us more quick in the discernment of proper means : it will habituate us to attention, and, thus make the most irksome part of our intellectual conduct pleasant. Lastly, it will strengthen our resolution by weakening discouragements, or keeping them out of view.

To conclude : Notwithstanding the infirmities we labour under, there is no occasion to despair : the wise virgins, though they “ slumbered and slept,” were yet awakened by the mercy of Providence : the same Providence watches over us for good, being equally tender of us ; and therefore, if we pursue carefully those important instructions which the sense of our infirmity suggests to us, “ our labour will not be in vain,” but “ the strength of the Almighty will be made perfect in our weakness.”

Samuel Hill, New York, 1811

Dear Sir,
I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 10th inst. in relation to the purchase of a lot of land in the town of New York, and in answer to inform you that the same has been referred to the proper authorities for their consideration. I am, Sir, very respectfully,
Yours, &c.

S E R M O N XIV.

THE DUTY OF AN INOFFENSIVE
CONDUCT.

I CORINTHIANS X. 32.

Give none offence.

THIS precept must be understood with some limitation; for though there are many things which a wise man would sacrifice to peace, there are some which a good man cannot. The rights of conscience are sacred, and the obligations

tions of religion inviolable; and whilst a christian stedfastly resolves at all times to keep them so, it is not possible but he must give offence to some. The brightest pattern of inoffensive meekness, Jesus Christ himself, with all his gentleness of temper and prudence of conduct, could not "live peaceably with all men." His fidelity to his Father's cause, and the interests of truth and righteousness exposed him to a torrent of envy, and brought upon him all the malignity and malice of the Jewish priests and rulers, who took great offence at the testimony he bore against the iniquity of their conduct.

When peace with men stands in competition with our duty to God, we should not be afraid of giving them offence. This is an adjudged case, a plain determined point; that "we ought to please God rather than man," or chuse to offend man rather than God, when we are so unhappy as to be in such a situation, wherein the offending one of them is unavoidable. These circumstances the apostles were in, when they were charged by the Sanhedrim never more "to preach or teach in the name of Jesus." To comply with this command would have been

been a great offence to God; not to comply, a great offence to man. But they made no difficulty of the alternative; being determined at once to obey God rather than man; wherein they have laid down a rule for us to act by in all like cases.

Nay, in such a case, we should not only be constant to risk the displeasure of men, but to suffer the utmost efforts of their malice, rather than deliberately offend the God that made us, as Joseph was, who dared to disobey the wicked command of his mistress; and the three children, that of Nebuchadnezzar. And to this principle the martyrs constantly adhered, and chose to endure the greatest sufferings rather than violate their conscience, and to renounce their lives rather than their religion.

And not only the honour of God but the rights of conscience must be maintained as sacred in opposition to all that would invade them, however it may offend them. By the rights of conscience I mean, that power which God and nature have given to every man, to act and think in all matters that concern religion, not according to the authoritative decrees

and decisions of men, but according to the dictates and determinations of his own conscience, reason, and judgment. Conscience is not to be controuled by any human authority. The very attempt to controul it is insolent and impious. It is flying in the face of the Almighty and counteracting his own work; who hath given to conscience this inviolable prerogative, to be uncontroulable by any thing but his own Almighty Power.

As nothing is more glorious than to suffer persecution in the cause of God and conscience, so nothing is more wicked than to excite it. Nor is it less ridiculous than it is impious. Methods of violence are a foolish way of confuting an error, as if cruelty were the parent of truth, corporeal punishment the cure of mental infirmities, and a man's mind could be enlightened by the flames that consume his body. Wherever we see then any marks of such a persecuting spirit (which is ever the offspring of superstition and bigotry, as they are of pride and ignorance) we should readily oppose it; and dare to be advocates for the sacred rights of conscience wherever we see them arrogantly trampled upon, however

however we may incur the displeasure of men thereby. For herein we are advocates for God, for his own wisdom and workmanship; and for that which is the very foundation of all sincere and acceptable religion; which would be entirely at an end if the consciences of men were to be dictated to, domineered over, and trampled upon, by the arrogance and superstition of their fellow-creatures, as liable to mistake and error as other men.

Nor are the perverse and unreasonable humours of men to be always submitted to for fear of giving offence. Where religion and conscience are out of the case, there ought indeed to be great condescension and compliance for the sake of peace: nor would it be either wise or charitable to provoke a man of a perverse spirit by a stiff opposition in little things, even where fact and truth may be against him; which might probably kindle those flames of contention which we should afterward find extremely difficult to extinguish. For Solomon's observation is very just, "that the beginning of strife is
 "as when one letteth out water;" and the advice he gives us thereupon is exceedingly wise; "therefore leave off con-

“tention before it be meddled with.” But still I see no obligation a man is under to suffer his reason to be always controuled, and his understanding to be insulted, by a proud and petulant humour. The truth (especially if it be very plain and important) ought to be sometimes asserted, strongly proved, and closely urged; and the vanity and ignorance of the conceited humourist mortified and exposed. This we sometimes owe to the cause of truth and common justice.

Nor ought an uncharitable and superstitious spirit to be always indulged by our abstaining from things in their own nature innocent and indifferent, purely because some persons of that cast are pleased to censure and take offence at them: I mean provided those things give no real offence, by becoming the occasion of sin to others. There is no reason and no end in being very solicitous to please those who are displeased without reason. If persons will take offence where none is really given, it is their own fault. It is they that violate the precept in the text, for to take offence unreasonably is to give it.

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It is lawful sometimes to give offence to others for the sake of their good; that is, when the good we are able to do them cannot be done without it. This especially takes place in case of reproof; where a person's interest and wisdom render him capable of giving it, and his station and character make it his duty so to do.

This, it must be owned, is a very nice and delicate affair: for reproof may be given by some persons in such a manner as to administer just cause of offence; whereby, whatever views they had therein, they really do more harm than good. For instance, when a person takes upon him this office, for which he hath neither interest, nor authority, nor wisdom to qualify him: or when the reproof is so severe, and the ground of it so trifling, that it plainly appears to proceed from pique or pride in the person that gives it, rather than from any fault in him that receives it. But if a person be authorized to give reproof, is capable of it, and is sensible of the necessity of it for the advantage of him to whom it is addressed, such a one ought not to be deterred from giving it on proper occasions, through

fear of giving offence. A parent would tie up his hands from doing many things for the good and benefit of his children, were he always to act upon this principle, never to do any thing which may grieve or displease them. The same maxim (which is not founded on meekness but excessive tenderness or timidity) would deprive some of our best friends of an opportunity of doing us the most signal service; and indeed is a quality which one would not wish for in a friend; and is seldom found in a real one.

Nor should we be afraid of giving a private offence when it is necessary to the public good. Otherwise magistrates would not be faithful to their trust; nor could penal laws be executed, nor criminals detected; who doubtless are very much offended and displeased with those who are the instruments of bringing them to justice.

We should not be too scrupulous of giving offence in justifying an injured character, or in vindicating the honour and reputation of an absent person, when aspersed or abused by the petulance of an unbridled or malicious tongue. For this

this is nothing but common justice due to injured innocence; and what humanity dictates. And surely they who are unreasonably severe on the characters of others, can with no face of reason resent a just and seasonable animadversion upon their own; or be offended with us for telling them a plain truth to their face, who are guilty of a much greater indecorum, in reporting perhaps a notorious falshood of others behind their back.

Lastly; When the honour, interest and credit of religion are manifestly concerned, they ought not to be meanly prostituted for the sake of peace; but defended with a force of reason and remonstrance becoming the importance of the subject, whatever diminution it may be to our own character in the esteem of the persons we oppose.

These are some of those restrictions and limitations with which the precept in the text must be taken and guarded.

Let us now consider the proper latitude and extent of it, in a few particulars wherein men are most apt to forget it.

First; We should take care we do not

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give needless offence to others in matters of opinion: especially in subjects of mere speculation; which are commonly not of importance enough for a wise man to spend his zeal upon, much less to lose his temper for. And yet so it often happens, that things of the smallest moment are zealously defended as essentially necessary, whilst matters of the highest concern are neglected as indifferent.

To prevent giving offence in matters of opinion, let us often think with ourselves thus: "It is reasonable to suppose, "that how much soever others differ "from us, they have the same zeal and "fondness for their sentiments as we have "for our own; and are no less assured "that the truth lies on their side than we "are that it lies on ours. To say, it is "their ignorance and obstinacy that they "do not think as we do, is great weakness; because for the same reason they "may say, it is our ignorance and obstinacy that we do not think as they do. "Whereas the true reason why we do "not see things in the same light is, because we see with different eyes and "through

“ through a different medium. To brand
 “ others with heresy or schism because
 “ they do not come up to our standard
 “ in any particular modes of faith or
 “ worship, is the characteristic of a little,
 “ narrow, proud spirit. It favours too
 “ much of youthful heat or confidence,
 “ and goes off in proportion as we ad-
 “ vance in wisdom, virtue, and self-
 “ acquaintance. It is indeed genuine
 “ bigotry; the true offspring of igno-
 “ rance and pride united; which we
 “ clearly see hath been the source of the
 “ greatest offence and mischief to the
 “ church of Christ in all ages. What
 “ follows then, but that we be content
 “ that others differ from us as much as
 “ they please? All we desire is, that we
 “ may be permitted to differ as much
 “ from them in peace and charity.”

In like manner we should take care
 how we give just offence to weak christi-
 ans in matters of practice. If any parti-
 cular practice of ours be a means of
 drawing others into sin, or encouraging
 them to act contrary to their own con-
 sciences, it is no longer an indifferent
 thing whether we continue in it or not.
 Though it be in itself indifferent, yet if

it gives real offence to weak and scrupulous consciences, *that* is a good reason why it ought to be discontinued. This is a rule the apostle hath often laid down in this case, and by which he was determined to form his own conduct. "If," says he, "the eating meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no more meat whilst the world stands, lest I make my brother to offend."

We should likewise take care not to give offence in our discourse or conversation with others. To which end we should avoid all needless and positive contradiction; which is commonly disgusting, especially when it appears to proceed from pride and affectation; and sometimes is the beginning of much uncharitable contention. As we often find that they who are most ready to contradict are most impatient of contradiction, so in general we may observe, that they who are most apt to give offence are least able to bear it. Not that we are bound to indulge the caprice of every conceited humourist; but it will be often found the wisest way to let such have their humour, rather than by a stiff opposition to inflame them. A prudent, peaceable,
and

and inoffensive christian will do what he can to render himself agreeable in all companies, and procure the esteem of men by all obliging compliances, consistent with the restrictions I have before mentioned.

Again; We should take care to give no just offence in our way of commerce or dealings with men; either by exaction and oppression; or by rigorous and exorbitant claims, beyond the rules of equity and mercy, where there is but small ability to answer them. This the prophet calls "grinding the face of the poor:" or by methods of fraud, in order to secure a profit to ourselves by the loss and damage of another; or by taking advantage of his ignorance to over-reach and deceive him. For there is but little difference in the eye of God and of conscience, where we injuriously deprive a man of his property by fraud or by force. The injustice in the former case is equal to that in the latter, though the villainy appear not so flagrant in the eye of the world.

These things cannot fail to give great offence, and that very justly; and especially when practised by those who profess

to be governed, all the while, by the strictest principles of christianity. The only general rule applicable to all particular cases of this nature, in order to avoid giving just offence to any, is *that* which our Saviour hath laid down for us, and by which he requires every christian to direct his conduct, namely, "to do to others that which, upon a change of circumstances, we should judge reasonable that others should do to us. That is, to put ourselves into another's place, and to do nothing to him but what in that case we should be willing to receive from him."

Farther; We should take care not to give offence to others by our temper. Particularly we should guard against a vain and ostentatious temper; which prompts a man to make himself the frequent subject of his own discourse, to hint at his own excellencies, and to possess others with a high idea of whatever he values himself most upon. It is easy to observe how hard such persons will labour and beg, in an oblique way, for a little incense to their own vanity; which if they cannot obtain from others, they seldom fail of setting them an example
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by sprinkling it themselves. This temper if it prevails, is offensive enough. But not near so bad as

A rigid, censorious, and detracting spirit; which often proceeds from the same original as the other, secret pride and excessive self-love. Such men seek to raise their own reputation for wisdom, wit or piety on the ruins of another man's: and sensible that their character will make but a poor figure in the midst of others that outshine it, eclipse them to make their own conspicuous; hoping to appear more illustrious in proportion as they make others appear less so.

A passionate and revengeful temper is also a very offensive one. And not only so, but a most mischievous and hurtful one; and the farthest from the true christian temper of any whatsoever. This gives very just and universal offence. And so does

An arbitrary, over-bearing, and impetuous temper; which tyrannizes over ingenuous modesty, and thinks to carry all before it by mere dint of noise and confidence. And,

Lastly; A mercenary and selfish temper; which shews a little, narrow, contracted

tracted heart, wrapped up in itself, and shut fast to all the world beside ! whereas the heart of a good man is open and generous, dilated with universal benevolence, and longs to diffuse joy and gladness all around it.

Such dispositions as these are universally odious and offensive, and lead to actions that are much more so ; and therefore ought carefully to be guarded against and avoided by every one that would “ keep his conscience void of offence towards all men.”

I add ; We should take care to give no offence to others by the abuse of those talents which we enjoy more than they. If we have more health, understanding, and learning, better parts, and a better estate than others, and grow vain and arrogant, self-sufficient and capricious on account of these, and under-value and despise others merely for the want of them ; this gives just and great offence, and shews that we are very unworthy of the talents we thus abuse.

Lastly ; we should take care how we give offence in any of those several relations in life wherein Providence hath placed us, whether they be superior or inferior

inferior ones; and by a conscientious regard to the duties and obligations of our respective characters seek at once to conciliate the favour of men, and secure the blessing of God, which he hath pronounced on those that "study the things which make for peace."

Having thus explained the nature of the duty enjoined in the text, I shall conclude by urging the practice of it from two considerations.

The first is from the example of our great Lord and Master Jesus Christ: which is not only our greatest motive to it (for as his disciples we profess to imitate him) but at the same time will be our best direction in the practice of it. In his life and temper we see it shine in all its perfection; and under all those due restrictions before-mentioned. He was not ashamed to maintain the cause of God and truth at the expence of his own peace and fame; nor afraid to oppose and reprove the proud priests and bigotted pharisees, though he knew he should give them offence and incur their hatred by so doing. Here he shewed the courage of a lion; but in other cases all the meekness of a lamb: and hath taught us
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by his example to temper the wisdom of the serpent with the innocence of the dove, without the venom of the one, or the weakness of the other.

And have we no ambition to be like our Divine Master, in his wise temper and conduct? Shall we be forever imitating the follies and foibles of weak deluded men, which will lead us wrong, and never regard that perfect pattern which we know will lead us right? Is this wise or reasonable? When he so often calls us to imitate him, calls us with the voice of a friend, and the compassion of a Saviour, shall we not give him this testimony of the love we so often profess to bear him?

When we see others acting contrary to the life and temper of Jesus, and we find ourselves inclined to imitate them, let us conceive him saying to us as he once did to Peter, "What is that to thee? follow thou me."

Let us also consider that he who makes no conscience of offending men, will make no conscience of offending God. Nay, herein he actually does offend him. A just occasion of offence given to them, is a real offence offered to him: because
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it is a wilful violation of his laws which in the most express manner have forbidden it. "To keep a conscience void of offence towards God, we must keep one void of offence towards man." And this is the only way to grow in favour with both.

To conclude; This character of a christian is so frequently recommended in the gospel of Christ, so signally exemplified in the life of Christ, contributes so much to our present peace and future hopes, and is in itself so excellent and beneficial, and withall so easily attained by the help of a little common care and circumspection, that nothing but an ignorance of, or inattention to these things, can be the reason that so little stress is laid upon it in proportion to its great importance. As we desire then to be consistent christians, let us, in obedience to the precept in the text, "give none offence."

S E R M O N XV.

THE INCURABLENESS OF SUPER-
STITION.

MICAH iv. 5.

*All people will walk, every one in the name
of his God.*

THAT there is but one God, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things, is not only the constant doctrine of divine revelation, but evidently demonstrable by the principles of reason; and yet nothing was less perceived
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and acknowledged than this important truth, for a long period of many ages, throughout almost all the several kingdoms of the earth. Even those who were most learned and polite had not attained to this knowledge of the one God, and whatsoever improvements they made in other respects, here they continued mere Barbarians, as rude and uninformed as those who were the most savage and uncultivated. The sacred writers inform us of the many idols of the ancient nations; each country and city having a separate, local, and tutelary deity of their own, without calling in question the divinity of the gods that were acknowledged and adored by others. Under the *Ægyptian*, *Assyrian*, and *Babylonish* monarchies, the same principle of polytheism prevailed, and the most irrational and absurd rites were practised in honour of the gods they had consecrated. The wisdom of the Greeks was not sufficient to cure them of this folly; and though the Romans conquered the world, they were themselves abject slaves to this superstition, and held by their prejudices in bondage to the meanest and most impious idolatries. And so obstinate was their adherence

adherence to the corruptions and errors they had espoused, that it evidently appeared to be beyond the reach of all ordinary methods ever to recover them from it; being proof against all conviction and reason, and treating the very attempt to unsettle them as to their opinions, and dissuade them from the rites they had been accustomed to, as an instance of the most offensive and criminal impiety.

Nor was their zeal in the least diminished, though the gods they worshipped had the most infamous characters, and often demanded from them sacrifices, which the dictates of nature and honour forbade them to offer up to them. Had their several deities been esteemed by them as benevolent, friendly beings, delighting in virtue, and acting as the patrons and guardians of it; concerned for the welfare of mankind, and always ready to promote it; this would have seemed some justification of their conduct, and rationally accounted in some measure for the warmth they expressed in the defence of them, and for the honours and adorations that were paid them. But it is really at first appearance astonishing
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to consider, that beings confessed to be of the most cruel, revengeful, capricious, proud, lewd, dishonest dispositions, and stained with all the vices of human nature, should ever be put into the number of deities; or be looked on and acknowledged as objects of religious adoration; or that any should ever have imagined, that the murder of infants and children, the sacrifice of men, the prostitution of their wives and daughters, and other like enormities and crimes, could possibly be the methods of worship rational in themselves, and agreeable to the nature of things; or that they could ever be demanded by, and acceptable to Superior Beings, when they could not but be the abhorrence of all that had any thing of humanity, tenderness, honour or virtue, amongst the children of men. And yet such was the fanatical zeal for these infamous deities, and the absurd and monstrous worship that was paid them, that they not only acknowledged their divinity themselves, and practised these enormities in honour of them, supporting them by public establishment and laws, and rendering it capitally penal to introduce other deities, and other rites of
worshipping

worshipping them; but endeavoured by all the methods of authority, worldly advantages, artful persuasions, fraud and violence, to propagate the worship of them amongst others, to profelyte them to these foul idolatries, and to extinguisht from amongst mankind all better sentiments of Deity, and all other forms of religion that were humane, pure, and worthy of the nature of God and man.

In like manner, we find in the most ancient times that the Moabites drew in the people of God to sacrifice to Baal Peor. The Jewish kings, who had forsaken Jehovah their God, and were perverted to the idolatries of the nations around them, employed all their power to corrupt their people, and persecuted and murdered his prophets for their stedfast adherence to him and his institutions.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, gave full proof of the fiery warmth of his zeal, by peremptorily decreeing; "Whosoever falleth not down and worshippeth the golden image, shall the same moment be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace;" and in the rage of his anger thus imperiously demands, in the lordly tone of a royal furious

rious persecutor, "O Shadrach, Meshach, "and Abednego, do ye not serve my "gods, nor worship the golden image, "which I have set up?" and upon their presuming to answer; "We will not "serve thy gods, nor worship thy golden "image," instantly orders them, as the punishment of their contumacy, to be committed to the flames.

The Macedonian princes that reigned over Asia, though most of them some of the worst of men, yet were great bigots to their gods and superstitions, hated the Jewish nation, and vowed their destruction, because the object and rites of their religion were different from their own.

After the christian religion had been introduced into the world, and by the great prevalence and spread of it, was found to be prejudicial to the established religion of the Roman empire, the profession of christianity was made a capital offence; christians were condemned as impious and atheists, without trial or liberty of defence, merely for their refusal of that worship to the gods; which their religion censured as an execrable superstition; and the most exquisite punishments were inflicted on them for their contumacy

stancy in professing the faith of Jesus, and adhering to the worship of the true God, who alone was forbidden to be worshipped, whilst every thing else was allowed to receive adoration.

I might here mention, that though Mahometanism was evidently the invention of an impostor, and is in its nature a mixture of absurdity and fable, yet it no sooner found reception amongst that barbarous and ignorant people who first embraced it, but it inspired them with a sanguinary zeal to propagate it, and drew the sword as the most speedy and effectual method of making converts, and gaining over mankind to the acknowledgment and profession of it.

But to leave all other instances, the truth of the observation in the text is confirmed, in the most remarkable manner, by the obstinate and incurable superstitions of the Romish church. To differ in any point from the established doctrine, is with her unpardonable heresy, and a crime not to be expiated but by blood. To dissent from her modes of worship, though scandalously corrupt, childish and wicked, is in her account a schism that excludes from all friendship

with men, and cuts off from the salvation of God. And so obstinate is the attachment of those in her communion to the idolatries she hath established, under these apprehensions, that they dread nothing more than conviction, and flee from all the means of it as infectious and pestilential. And as they will have no other religion themselves, they will allow none to have a different religion from their own; and such as have, are the objects of their hatred and malice, they envy them their very lives, and are always prepared by principle and disposition to extirpate them out of the world, and want nothing but the power to accomplish it. Thus we see that bigotry is the constant attendant of all false religions, and that there is nothing to which men are more obstinately attached than to the gods which their imaginations and superstitions have created, and the errors in religious principles and practice they have been once persuaded to submit to. "All people will walk, every one in the name of his god."

Let us now enquire into the reasons of this surprising fact, and how this general adherence of mankind to false objects and modes of worship is to be accounted for.

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And here we may lay it down as a general and certain rule, that as ignorance is the parent of superstition, so it is the great guardian and security of it. It comes in, and lives, and prospers by it. To this cause the apostle assigns the errors of the gentile world with respect to God, and the corruptions of religion that universally prevailed amongst them. "Their foolish heart was darkened, and therefore they became vain in their imaginations;" and though they had some notion of God, yet "they glorified him not as God, but changed the glory of the incorruptible God into images made like to corruptible men, and birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." And though many of those who introduced the idolatries and superstitions of the nations, were crafty, designing, politic men; yet they had to do with a rude, uncultivated, uninformed and barbarous generation, easy to be deceived, and ready to submit to all the prescriptions of their leaders and governors, implicitly, and without the least examination. In such circumstances were the superstitions of almost all nations introduced; of Egypt, Greece, pa-

gan Rome, the imposture of Mahometanism, and the corruptions of popish Rome; and by the same powerful cause men have been constantly held in a state of dishonourable slavery to them; upon which account St. Paul calls the long period, in which these superstitions prevailed, "the times of ignorance."

The generality of the world will not give themselves leave to reflect, nor willingly be at the pains and trouble of impartial examination and strict enquiry; especially into so abstract, difficult, abstruse and uncertain an affair as they imagine that of religion to be. They are too deeply immersed in the secular concerns of life, or too warmly engaged in the pursuit of sensual gratifications and pleasures, or have too prevailing an indifference to all subjects of a religious nature, ever to concern themselves about it. And therefore if they must have a religion, they would rather take it by trust, and receive at a venture that which is ready prepared to their hands; and upon the same principle are against all innovations and changes, warmly contend for the things they have received from others, and without regarding whether they are right
or

or wrong, adhere to them themselves, and are for enforcing them universally on others. Especially

If there hath been propagated an opinion of their divine original, and that these errors and superstitions have been introduced by gods, or men under the inspiration of the gods, are such as they have commanded and approved, and by any peculiar signs and manifestations have appeared in favour of; the veneration for them grows higher, the attachment to them more strong, and all opposition to them is condemned as wickedness and impiety. On this foundation the bigotry of the gentiles to their sacred rites was built and supported, as they were taught to believe that they had their first rise from some deity, or that the first institutors of them had been favoured with divine communications, and particularly instructed in the mysteries of the religion they established, and which they imagined were afterwards confirmed and improved, upon extraordinary occasions, by immediate and special directions from above; and that therefore the christian religion, as different and contrary to

it, was to be looked on and treated as a very impious and execrable superstition.

It is another prejudice in favour of them, if they can pretend to high antiquity, and to have been derived down by a long succession from former ages. This gives them a venerable air; cloaths them with dignity, and makes especially unthinking and weak minds look on them as grown sacred and inviolable by years, and esteem it a kind of sacrilege to alter or remove them. This was the reasoning of paganism, in vindication of its dominion over mankind, that it had been
“held in perpetual uniform veneration,
“which had never been infringed, but
“rather increased by its long duration,
“and that the ancients had always attributed to their temples and ceremonies,
“a sacredness in proportion to their antiquity.”

And this prejudice is greatly strengthened, if besides the claim of antiquity, they have been delivered down to them from their fore-fathers and ancestors, as what their piety and wisdom approved, and what they lived and died in the belief and practice of. To deviate from their institutions is looked on as a kind of
of

of outrage committed on their memories and characters, as an high reflection on their knowledge and prudence, and as the severest censure that can be passed on their condition. And therefore the very natural instinct that men have to reverence and esteem their ancestors, and hope favourably of their state after the present life, gives them a strong bias in favour of their religious sentiments and practices; which they look on and receive as the most valuable part of their inheritance, and of which they will not suffer themselves ever to be easily and willingly dispossessed. And this was a consideration of great importance and weight with the ancient heathens, and what they strongly insisted on: the gods, the ceremonies, the religion of their forefathers, were never to be departed from.

If to this can be added the universal or general consent of nations, kingdoms, of lawgivers and kings, the rich and great, the wise and learned, the prepossession will be still proportionally more powerful, and the cure of it more difficult and improbable; for the generality will not easily be brought to think, that national establishments are founded in falshood and

iniquity, that the several constitutions of the world have been formed upon a plan of idolatry and impiety; that those which have been esteemed the most sacred laws of all nations, have been only in support of irreligion and vain superstition, and that what almost all mankind, of all ages, characters, stations and circumstances have agreed in, can either be wrong in theory, or evil in practice. Hence this was urged as a strong argument against christianity, and thought an unanswerable vindication of the principles and customs of the heathen world. "We see," says one of them, "throughout all empires, provinces, and cities, that all have their several national sacred rites, and peculiar gods; and that the Romans adopted them all; and that therefore, though to account for, and assign the origin of the gods, cannot be done with certainty, yet since all nations consent in the belief and worship of them, I can bear with no man, who, swollen with boldness, and I know not what irreligious prudence, endeavours to subvert or weaken this ancient, useful and profitable religion."

There

There is besides all this, a pomp and splendor generally in all false religions, that is extremely captivating and pleasing, that catches men's attention, raises their admiration, and secures their approbation and esteem. Pure religion, unadorned, in its native simplicity, without pomp and external solemnity, passes almost unobserved, or is looked upon with contempt; whilst the eye is fixed, and the ear charmed by the costly decorations of superstition, and the numerous rites that are almost constantly employed in it. And here the ceremonies of paganism had almost every circumstance of this kind to recommend it, stately temples, images and gifts of gold and silver, a splendid priesthood, rich endowments, solemn music, vocal and instrumental; every thing to charm the senses, and excite an ignorant and bigotted zeal in favour of it. It was no wonder then that this should be an objection against primitive christianity. "Why hath it no altars, no temples, or images?" Or that christians themselves should be held in abhorrence by men who were fond of these things, because they despised the temples of the heathens, treated their gods with

O 5 indignity,

indignity, derided their sacred rites, and slighted the honours of their priests.

If under the prevalence of superstition and false religions, kingdoms and nations have been favoured with all instances of worldly prosperity, with peace and plenty, with victory in their wars, and triumph over their enemies; this is farther looked on as a presumption, that their objects of worship are real, and the religious rites they perform, such as are grateful to them: especially if their prosperity should be consequent upon some solemn ceremonies practised in honour of them, or some peculiar calamities should be removed after superstitions made use of to propitiate or appease them. This will make such impressions, to the advantage of the worst kind of them, as will not be easily worn out.

Or, if after any supposed defect in, or appearing contempt of the usual superstitions, or some temporary casual intermission of them, any remarkable calamities have happened to fall out, either to the public, or to particular persons who have been in a special manner chargeable with such contempt of them; this
hath

hath greatly strengthened the general credulity, and heightned the veneration for the Deities, by whose displeasure these evils have been supposed to be inflicted.

All the foregoing causes concur in the support of superstition; but the main and principal one, and without which all the forementioned would be in a great measure ineffectual, is, that all false religions are reconcileable with the passions and vices of men, indulge them in their favourite lusts, and flatter them with methods of safety even in the habitual pursuits of the most criminal gratifications. True religion represents the great Object of worship as a Being of infinite wisdom and rectitude of nature, and as taking pleasure in nothing but what resembles himself; governing his rational creation by laws of the most perfect sanctity, requiring from them an internal worship of the mind and conscience, by the exercise of the most worthy affections, productive of the practice of the most substantial virtues; as admitting no compensations for men's wilful and habitual vices, nor allowing any thing in exchange for moral righteousness; and as approving and accepting nothing but what par-

takes of his moral image and likeness; and therefore as condescending to no terms of peace and reconciliation to mankind, without repentance, and those sacred fruits that are meet for it, the fruits of a new and chearful obedience for the future. This is the unalterable condition that true religion prescribes of reconciliation and acceptance with God; a condition not at all relished by sensual men, which they censure as harsh and severe, against which all their passions and inclinations reluctate, and render them strongly and almost incurably averse. And therefore they are more open to the insinuations of superstition, which teaches how to be pious without virtue, how to be religious without repentance and amendment, to appease the offended Deity without reformation and a better life, and to secure his favour without any resemblance to him in moral rectitude and perfection. The end superstition invariably pursues, is to destroy the obligations of all true godliness, and to substitute the shadow, the appearance, in the room of the substance; speculation instead of practice; external forms instead of inward good dispositions; bodily exercises

cises for the steady practice of virtue ; pomp and ceremony in the place of a spiritual and true worship ; outward atonements and satisfactions without any change of heart, or reformation of manners ; in a word, any thing, every thing, to the exclusion of what is absolutely important and necessary to the favour of God, and the true happiness of mankind. And therefore it is impossible but that men must be prejudiced against true religion, just in proportion as they are in favour of their vices ; because true religion will not bend to inclination, nor pay any compliment to the crimes of the rich and great, nor allow them any hope without reformation, nor interest in the protection and friendship of God, without being in their measure " holy as he is holy." But superstition is sure to charm them by complaisance and submission, doth not rudely interrupt their pleasures, doth not imperiously restrain their passions ; kindly indulges their favourite inclinations, freely allows them to enter into all the liberties of the world, hath palliatives to calm the uneasy suggestions of conscience, and soft expedients to remove every
troublesome

troublesome suggestion that may distress them.

And finally, though the forementioned causes have greatly conspired to promote the interest, and maintain the influence of superstition over mankind, yet still there is another remaining, without the concurrence of which it would often give way, and yield to the superior power and stronger convictions of truth: namely, the secular advantages arising from it, and its subserviency to promote the views and schemes of crafty and intriguing politicians.

Superstition is a very vague, uncertain, and intricate thing, that hath no fixed rules and principles to govern it, and is not to be carried on, with decency and success, without numerous hands; nor the dignity of it to be maintained, nor the ends of it secured, unless it be made the interest of those who are to manage the springs of it, to play it off with advantage, and dextrously to apply it, as times, circumstances, and emergencies shall require. When high honours, large revenues and great immunities are annexed to the ministers of it; when their persons are declared sacred, and their services

ces and functions venerable and divine; this will not fail to induce men of secular views and dispositions readily to engage in them, to support them with all their authority, and to use all the methods that art and subtilty can suggest to vindicate and maintain them. If they cannot approve them in their minds, as agreeable to the nature of true religion, they will approve them as lucrative and gainful, and when all their secular advantages depend on the continuance of them, they will themselves treat all opposition to them as the most criminal impiety, and excite others by all their fears and terrors for the defence of them. They will find means to disguise or degrade the dignity of truth itself, to obscure the evidence of it, to keep it out of the view of the generality of mankind, or to render it contemptible and odious. They will give to falshood the honourable appearance of truth, cover over the most palpable absurdities with the sacred drefs of mysteries, and convert the most impious idolatries into the venerable rites and ceremonies of religion, and vindicate them by such spurious glosses and artful reasonings, as shall somewhat conceal their
native

native shame and deformity, and render them palatable to the unthinking, weak, and credulous. And that nothing may be wanting to give credit to the errors they live by, and those superstitious practices that are the fruitful sources of all their profits and emoluments, they will not fail to employ pious frauds and lying wonders to support their cause, nor scruple to introduce the gods themselves, as vindicating their own divinities and rites by miraculous operations. To both these methods of false reasoning and forged miracles, paganism had frequent recourse for its protection and defence, and by these it combated primitive christianity, which came naked and unendowed with any secular advantages into the world, was never introduced with any lucrative designs, and had nothing to depend on to gain reception amongst mankind, but its own intrinsic excellency and worth, and that demonstration of the spirit and power of God that attended it.

Add to all this, the subserviency of superstition to promote the designs, and carry on the views of crafty and intriguing statesmen, and it will appear but natural, that they should join in full confederacy

federacy with the inventors and immediate ministers of, and dependents on it, to render it secure and inviolable. As it was first introduced, in a great measure by policy and fraud, so it hath been constantly supported by these methods, as artful and designing men have found occasion for the use of it; who having themselves too often, no fixed principles of religion, have never scrupled to impose on the ignorance and credulity of others, or to fall in with any kind of popular prejudices and errors, as often as they imagined the public utility required it, or when it became necessary to gratify their ambition and pride, or when it appeared to them any security of their authority, grandeur, and power.

A false religion is every way applicable to these views, is tractable in its make, perpetually shifting and varying its form, as circumstances may change, is consistent with any kind of expedients that the intricacies of states, or the pride and pleasure of arbitrary princes may render necessary; and in a word, is as flexible to all the designs of political craftsmen, as they themselves can desire it to be. And therefore it is not to be expected,

expected, but that they will give it their countenance, support the patrons of it, establish it by human laws, guard it by the terrors of the civil power, render it in all its ministrations and offices honourable and gainful, and upon no pretence whatsoever admit of any kind of alterations for the better, after it is once introduced and established. And in order to prevent it, the creatures and ministers of princes will flatter them into an opinion and belief of their power to prescribe to others, in matters of religion as well as state, and insinuate into their minds the dangerous consequences of suffering this power to be disputed, their constitutions to be opposed, and the established doctrines and rites to be altered or set aside: and by suggestions of the bad effects of innovations, as tending to raise up a spirit of faction, to sow discord, and give occasion to numerous animosities and seditions, they effectually excite the civil power, by the most vigorous measures, to oppose them, and prejudice or deter all ranks and degrees against ever attempting or consenting to them. And though a zeal for what is sacred, and the preservation of the established religion,

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is oftentimes the avowed pretence; yet real infidelity, and a contempt of all religion, any farther than the ends of government and power can be answered by it, is too frequently the true one. And though atheism and superstition appear as distant from each other as the poles in the heavens, and as irreconcilable as the greatest antipathies in nature, yet atheism often puts on the warmest zeal to maintain the rights and claims of superstition; and superstition, in return for the supports it receives from atheism, becomes subservient to all its views, and even dictates the very measures of accomplishing and securing them.

These things considered, the prevalence of superstition in the world, and the difficulty of its cure will be rationally accounted for; agreeably to the sense of the prophet Micah; "hath a nation changed their Gods, which yet are no Gods?" Which words are a strong assertion, that no instance of this kind was ever, or but rarely to be found; and that no history could name the people that had done it. "All people will walk, every one in the name of his God." Let his character be what it will, they will maintain their veneration

neration for him, and however absurd, irrational, unnatural, and immoral his rites of worship are, they will obstinately practise them. And though this observation is the most convincing demonstration of the natural weakness, ignorance, and credulity of mankind, and shews how much they need some faithful guide in matters of religion, and how easily they run into the grossest and most contemptible mistakes in this important affair, when wholly left to their own reasonings and conclusions concerning it; yet the experience of all past ages and nations, and even of the age in which we ourselves live, is such a confirmation of its truth, as leaves not the least room to question or deny it.

If the influence of superstition in the minds of men be such as hath been represented, how surprizing was the speedy propagation and prevalence of the christian religion in the world! how honourable the triumphs of christianity over the gods and superstitions of mankind! Superstitions rendered sacred by the pretence of a divine original, confirmed by the universal consent of nations, grown venerable by long prescription and antiquity, guarded by the superstitious fears
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of mankind, become inviolable by the laws of kingdoms, woven into their constitutions, defended by the power of kings and princes, supported by the tricks of priests, having the most prevailing advocates in the passions and vices of men, and which had constantly defeated all the attempts of human learning, wisdom, and philosophy! Yet thus intrenched, thus guarded by the strongest bulwarks, thus defended by the united force of earth and hell, superstition, after innumerable struggles, and the fiercest opposition that could be made by it, yielded, though unwillingly yielded, to "Christ, the wisdom of God, and the power of God!" Vanquished in every conflict it gave way, by every kind of opposition lost ground, by the very arms employed in its defence was defeated. Put to open shame, it retired at the bright appearance of truth and righteousness; the gods it had created became the objects of contempt, the temples it had erected were deserted, the idols it had consecrated were cast down, and the rites prescribed by it rejected as mean, sordid, impious and execrable; till at length, pursued by the sword of the word and spirit of God, it yielded up
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the important victory, and left christianity to triumph as the prevailing religion of the world.

I am indeed far from thinking that mere success is in itself an argument of the goodness of any cause. But when it is considered that the Author of christianity was put to an accursed death, as a common malefactor, by his own nation; that his apostles, first friends, and immediate disciples were harrassed by the most severe and relentless persecution; that many attempts were made to crush his religion in its very infancy; that all the powers of the world rose in opposition to it, Jews and gentiles uniting their forces to prevent its reception in the world; that his doctrine was an offence to the one, and counted foolishness by the other; that the wise men scoffed at it, philosophy ridiculed it, and the learned treated it with contempt; that the constitutions of kingdoms denied it entrance, the laws of nations forbade the toleration of it, the pride of princes hated its instructions and restraints, the policies of the world absolutely renounced it, the superstitions of mankind abhorred it as the most formidable rival, and loaded it with charges of the most monstrous

strous impieties, and unnatural crimes, and that the corruptions and passions of human nature were its irreconcilable enemies; that it had no aids of human eloquence and fashionable oratory, no assistance from policy and craft, no support of human authority and power; nothing but itself, its own intrinsic excellency to recommend it, nor any thing to rely on for its preservation and success, but its claim to the truth of God, the supernatural evidence that attended it, and the protection of the Divine Wisdom and Power in which alone it gloried; that thus solitary and destitute, naked and friendless, calumniated and reviled, hated and persecuted, void of every visible and secular advantage, and in spite of the most numerous and powerful discouragements, it should nevertheless bear down all opposition, make converts numberless as “the drops of morning dew,” spread its conquests so rapidly throughout all nations, and in defiance of all kind of methods to suppress and extirpate it out of the world, should become the general religion of mankind; this is an event so extraordinary, that it can only be ascribed to the Power and Providence of that God who is wonderful

ful in counsel, and excellent in working.

To conclude; How highly ought we to esteem and value the religion of Christ which delivered the world from the bondage of superstition, turned men from their idols to serve the living and true God, and introduced that rational and spiritual worship of him, which, wherever it prevails in its native simplicity, must render the return of superstition and idolatry absolutely impossible! Let us embrace this holy religion as "worthy of all acceptation;" and in conformity to its genius, and in obedience to its precepts, let us "worship the great Father of all in spirit and in truth," without superstition, and without hypocrisy.

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